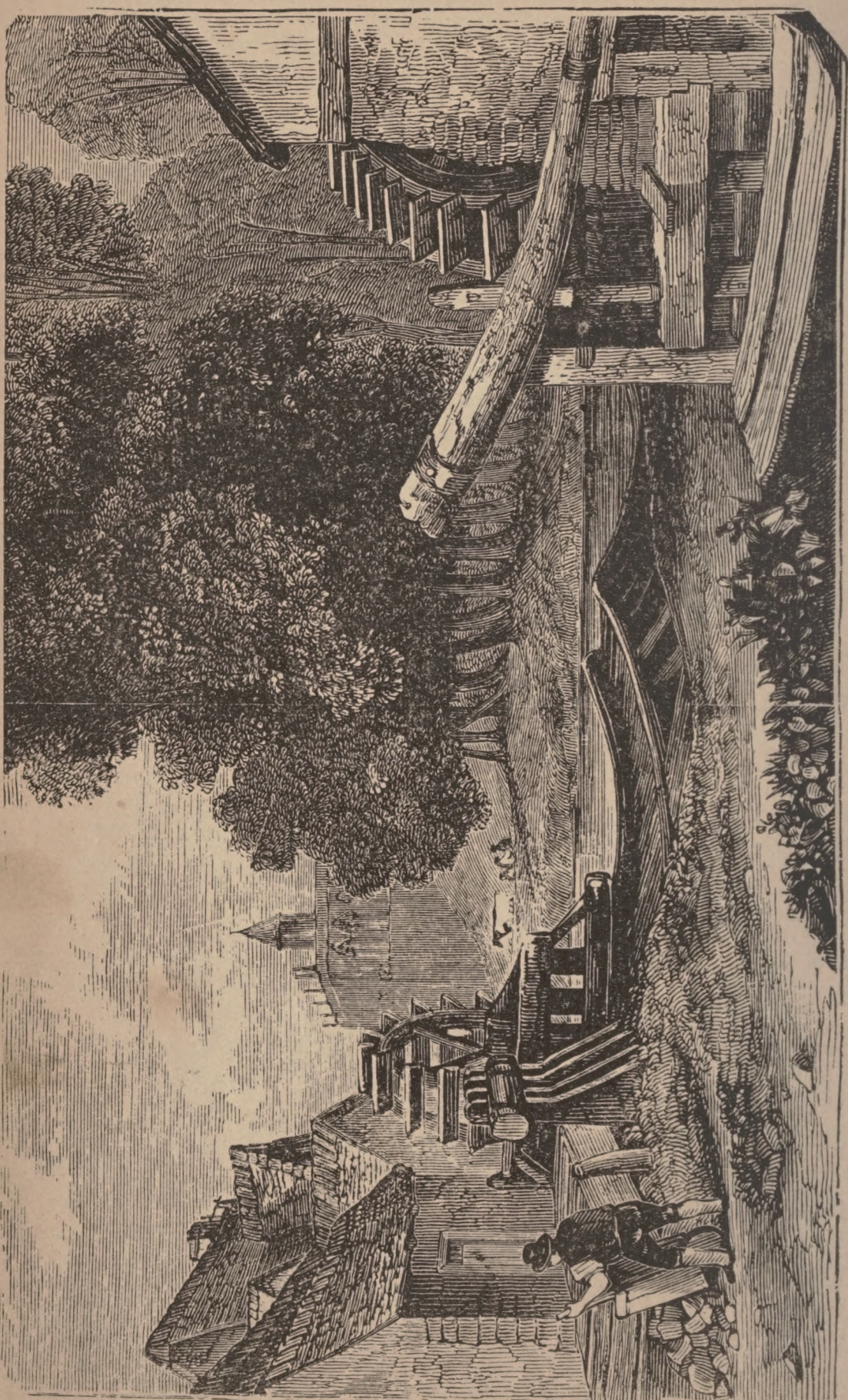








NOT IN THEIR SET;

OR,

IN DIFFERENT CIRCLES OF SOCIETY.

FROM THE GERMAN OF MARIE LENZEN, *née*

Sebregondi

By MS.

TRANSLATOR OF "BY HIS OWN MIGHT."



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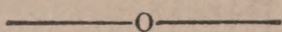
"MARIE LENZEN is the name of a lady novelist who has lately been much noticed in Germany. Her specialty is the so-called society novel. . . . 'NOT IN THEIR SET' and some other of the stories she has thus far published, turn on the subject of the struggle of parentless or deserted girls, with their surroundings. Her sketches of German society of the upper classes are of great merit."—*The Galaxy*.

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NOT IN THEIR SET.



CHAPTER I

LITTLE MARGARETHE.

LONG before the railroads spread their iron network over Europe, and only a few years after the time when the steamboats first began to cleave the waters of our native rivers, a few miles from the right bank of the Lower Rhine, stretched a wide tract of desolate moor. Nothing could wear more entirely that aspect of utter cheerlessness which is to be found only in such neglected patches of waste land. The soil gave few signs of the wave-like undulations peculiar to these tracts of country, and as it sloped towards the centre from every direction like a bowl, from whatever point a traveler might approach, the whole dreary, lifeless expanse lay stretched out before him. But rare as it may be to see a human countenance to which

youth does not lend a charm, be it ever so fleeting, it is still more unusual to find a patch of earth to which Spring cannot lure a smile. It was even so with the moor.

It was a warm, sunny noonday towards the close of May, and the moorland displayed all the scanty charms that nature had bestowed. The juniper bushes, sparsely scattered over the crests of the sandy hillocks which here and there rose a few feet above the plain, put forth new leaves; rushes and water lentils grew in the lowlands, and young plover circled around the little patches of marshy ground, mingling their piercing notes with the songs of the moorland larks. The mullens bent their woolly heads at every breath of the sultry south wind, and in more favorable spots a few brave daisies ventured to peep forth among the coarse grass. A few years before several enterprising persons had attempted to force the unproductive soil to yield some produce, but the project was found to be unremunerative, and therefore had been soon abandoned. For this purpose ditches had been dug here and there, and low walls thrown up to shut in the patch of moorland destined for cultivation; but within the enclosure the brown heath had again asserted its briefly contested supremacy; birches had taken root on the narrow tops of the walls, and clumps of broom clung to their rugged, crumbling sides. The tender twigs of the birches were now adorned with the most

beautiful golden green foliage, and the broom put forth blossoms as fresh and bright as if there was no surrounding barrenness and desolation, and neither dust nor drought had power to harm it.

A handsome open carriage, drawn by two strong brown horses, rolled along the miserable sandy road which led almost through the centre of the heath, making many an aimless turning. Two gentlemen were seated in the front of the calash, a third occupied the back, and on the box beside the coachman, was a bright-looking boy about nine years old, with a frank, blooming face. While his companions, without paying much attention to him, had been engrossed in an animated conversation, he had been gazing earnestly around him with an expression of eager curiosity, as if he wished to impress the singular picture of the desolate uniform plain firmly upon his mind. At first he gazed over the wide moor and fixed his eyes inquiringly on the wretched shrub-like trees on the distant walls of the enclosure, then looked up at the lofty, cloudless sky, and at last seemed to be earnestly examining the stunted vegetation near the road. He did all this half unconsciously, and entirely without design; but it betrayed a thoughtful mind and a certain talent for observation, which are rarely found united in early youth. But his years gradually began to assert their claims, and the little traveler ceased to look about him so eagerly. He first addressed a few words to the

coachman, but finding him surly and unsocial, turned his attention to the horses; and when these also ceased to occupy his thoughts, gazed into the distance at a hillock over which the vibrations of the air were made distinctly visible by the noon-day heat, and finally sank into that mood, which, when seen in children, may be either earnest meditation or indolent reverie.

Meantime, the carriage was approaching the only landmark visible for miles,—a huge old beech tree whose trunk rose to a considerable height, totally bare of leaves and branches, and then suddenly expanded into a majestic crown. True, the foliage was not so dense as is usually the case with this species of tree, but the fact of its being visible at a great distance from every direction, and the marked contrast it afforded to its surroundings, made it a very attractive object. The only shade on the whole moorland was to be found beneath its boughs, and thus the little hillock on which it stood, a few hundred paces from the highway, was the only enticing spot as far as the eye could reach.

The coachman, in compliance with his orders, stopped opposite to the tree. The gentlemen left the carriage; the boy roused himself from his dreamy state, and climbed down from his lofty seat very nimbly. The oldest of the gentlemen took out a basket and carried it to the tree, while the coachman unharnessed the horses, fastened

them behind the carriage, and gave them some provender.

“Well, gentlemen,” asked the oldest of the party, “shall we take some refreshment now, or settle our business first?”

They decided in favor of the latter; the basket was placed under the tree, Leo received orders to play in the shade, and the gentlemen walked away over the open moorland. They moved to and fro along the road, carefully examining the soil, then sought the highest points of land in the vicinity and stood opposite to a row of straw men which were arranged upon the moor cutting across the ground in a straight line. At intervals they spoke of sand and clay soils, of basalt and gravel, and the necessity of bringing these from a great distance, discussed workmen and wages, in short, all sorts of things, from which it might easily be guessed that a high road was to be built here, and the two young gentlemen were government officials who had charge of making arrangements for the enterprise, with the older man, the merchant, Herr Berger.

In a short time they agreed so far that the government officials promised the merchant not only to propose the terms upon which he would undertake the work, to the government, but to recommend that they should be accepted. The party then returned to the beech tree, under whose shade the coachman, assisted by Leo, had spread a

cloth and arranged upon it plates, knives, glasses, wine, and cold provisions. The improvised table looked so inviting that all eagerly attacked the food and wine; and the coachman seemed to consider the remnants left by the gentlemen, by no means too plentiful for the satisfaction of his own appetite.

While they were waiting for the horses to be harnessed, Leo pulled the merchant's coat, and whispered: "Papa, I am thirsty."

"Well," replied Herr Berger, "drink a glass of wine."

"I have, but it does no good."

"Then drink another."

"There is no more; Andreas has emptied all the bottles. Besides, I would rather have a glass of water."

"Foolish boy! how are we to get water here?"

"There's a house over yonder," said the little fellow, pointing to a somewhat delapidated roof that appeared in the midst of the moor, behind one of the walls previously mentioned.

"That doesn't look very inviting," replied Berger; besides, it is too far for us to send Andreas merely to get you a drink of water."

"But I am so thirsty, papa," said Leo.

"I can't help it; you must bear it for the few hours before we reach home."

The boy made a pitiful face, and uttered a comically long-drawn sigh; but, accustomed to implicit

obedience, did not venture to make any farther entreaties, when one of the young gentlemen kindly interposed.

“Don’t let the poor child suffer from thirst so long, Herr Berger,” said he, “the distance to the house cannot be very great, and what does it matter whether we reach D—— a half hour earlier or later? Besides, a walk to this cottage, or whatever it may be, may serve your purpose. You wish to find some house in the vicinity, where the laborers on the road can be sheltered while it is being constructed.”

“I am perfectly willing to go there,” replied Herr Berger, “if it will not tax your patience too severely.”

“Certainly not,” replied the young man’s companion, “let us go for the sake of my little friend. I hardly think, however, that he will get anything more than a glass of water, for I know the hut. In my wanderings through this neighborhood I have often passed it, and I never saw anything more wretched and miserable than the dwelling and its occupants; yet the peasant who lives there is a very droll fellow.”

The gentleman’s statement was fully verified. The miserable building was surrounded with a few small fields, sowed with rye, oats, and buckwheat; it was difficult to decide which of the three was most scanty and stunted. The house itself was built in a hollow, perhaps that it might have some

protection from the keen piercing winds that in Winter swept resistlessly over the moor. Other shelter there was none, for the attempt to raise some fruit trees in a patch of ground which bore some faint resemblance to a garden, had totally failed; only a bird-cherry tree which had grown tall and slender, and now bore an abundance of green fruit, had triumphed over the climate. With that exception the soil appeared to wish to have nothing to do with tree-culture; even a little fir shrub on the opposite side of the garden seemed completely stunted, and the birches in the ditches of the enclosure had the pitiful aspect of genuine starvation.

Berger and his companions surveyed the sorrowful picture at a single glance; but Leo only saw the half decayed planks around a well before the house, and exclaimed joyfully: "Ah! there is water!"

"Yes, young master," said the harsh voice of a man, who was sitting beside the door on a low block of wood, surrounded by a huge pile of dry heather, from which he was busied in making brooms of every size. "Yes, young master," he repeated rising, "there is water in it, as cold and clear as in Jacob's well."

"Good day, Jost," said one of the young gentlemen. "How do you know that the water in Jacob's well was cold and clear?"

"Why, the well was still in good condition when

Our Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman, and they certainly wouldn't have guarded it so long and so carefully if the water had been good for nothing," answered the peasant,—a sturdy, rather bandy-legged man, with a huge grey head, whose strongly marked features and large, light blue eyes, were not without an expression of intelligence and thoughtfulness.

"There is reason in what you say," replied the other; "but now suppose you play the good Samaritan, and give this little fellow, who is almost dead with thirst, a glass of water?"

"A glass of water?" asked Jost, pushing back his thick grey hair with the palm of his hand. "That's not very easily done."

"What, you won't refuse the boy a drink of water?"

"A drink, no sir; but a glass—I don't believe there is one in the house."

"Well then, bring it in a bowl or a mug," interposed Berger, somewhat peevishly; "the vessel is of no consequence provided the contents are good."

"There is sense in that too, sir," said Jost nodding; and then raised his voice in a loud call: "Ann'-Trine,—heh!—Ann'-Trine!"

A peasant woman, bare-footed and in her chemise sleeves, a tall, stout figure, evidently older than her husband, appeared around the corner of the house and asked sullenly: "Well, what are you shouting about, you—?"

The sentence remained unfinished, when she caught sight of the strangers, and an expression of surprise and embarrassment appeared on her bony face, as she made an awkward curtsy.

"Here are some strange gentlemen," said Jost, "and a young master, who wants some water to drink."

"Well, why don't you give him some yourself, you—?" An angry glance supplied the word.

"Why, Ann'-Trine, I'm not so smart as you," answered Jost with a grin, while his eyes sparkled so mischievously that his wife would certainly have become more furious than ever if she had noticed her husband; but without troubling herself any farther about him or the strangers, she went into the house and soon returned with a water pail and a large wooden ladle. Leo was satisfying his thirst with a long draught, when a fresh, childish voice suddenly cried: "Water, water, Greta wants to drink, too!"

The gentlemen gazed in astonishment towards the spot from whence the little voice proceeded, and perceived an object which seemed strangely at variance with the rude surroundings. In the corner between the pile of heather and the house, stood a large, coarse willow basket, filled with the long yellow blossoms of the hedge-mustard, a weed which in neglected fields often grows in great quantities among the oats; and in the midst of these wild flowers sat a little girl, scarcely more

than two years old, looking longingly at the water the boy was drinking. She was dressed in a knitted red bodice without sleeves, a small black silk cap covered her little head, and her fat, dimpled arms were only protected by the wide open sleeves of her chemise. These various articles of clothing were neither of fine material nor cut in the latest city fashion, but they were perfectly clean; the little chemise, especially, was of dazzling whiteness. The child's fair curls were so soft and bright, her little features so delicately lovely, that sitting between the rough old couple, she looked like a stray canary bird that had fallen into a goose nest.

While the strangers were still gazing in astonishment at the little creature, Leo had filled his ladle a second time, and carried it to the child. The little thing drank eagerly, then looked familiarly up to her young benefactor, and said pleadingly: "Run, run."

Somewhat timidly, as if he feared she might break, Leo lifted the little girl from the basket and placed her on the ground, where she instantly began to run up and down the slippery soil, with short but perfectly firm steps, here picking up a twig or pulling off a straw, and there lifting a pebble, only to throw them all away again the moment a new object attracted her attention. She showed no fear of the strangers, but apparently avoided the vicinity of the peasant woman, at

whom Jost laughed slyly, when the latter called: "Hop, Marie-Annchen."

"Ann'-Trine," said one of the younger gentlemen at last,—after all had watched the little creature for a time in silence,—“surely this is not your child?”

"No," replied the old woman smiling sourly; "thank God, no, I am too old for that."

"But you have children?"

"Yes, two daughters."

"So you are this little thing's grandmother?"

"No. My oldest daughter lives in M—— with a baker, and the other has taken service with the justice of the peace at B——."

"But how did you happen to get this lovely little creature?"

"I am rearing it out of charity," said Ann'-Trine.

Just at that moment the child fell down and began to cry; the foster mother rushed up to it, jerked it to its feet by its little arm, and shook it so angrily that its tears were hushed from terror. The woman's behavior did not seem very compassionate. Leo thought so too; he went up to the little one and tried to amuse it by laughing, clapping his hands, and whistling. She looked at him earnestly, checked her sobs, and was soon laughing as loudly and merrily as he. Then Leo sat down beside her, collected pebbles and flowers in her little apron, and felt very happy in his new role of guardian and comforter.

Meantime one of the gentlemen asked Jost whether his wife received any compensation for her charity.

"To be sure," answered the broom-maker; "that's just why she does it."

"Then," said Berger turning to Ann'-Trine, "you are probably not unwilling to gain a few perquisites now and then?"

"There's need enough of it, she replied. "What he earns by his broom-making is very little, and the soil is so poor here that it fattens neither cows nor men."

This answer suited Berger's object. After a short discussion, it was arranged that the long shed behind the house should be prepared for a sleeping place for the workmen to be employed upon the new road, while Ann'-Trine agreed to supply their food, with the help of one of her daughters, who was to be summoned home for the purpose.

As soon as this arrangement was concluded, the party prepared to depart. Leo was very unwilling to leave his little friend, and as soon as the child saw that he was really going, she ran after him, holding out her little arms, and weeping bitterly.

"I will come back again," said Leo consolingly, "I'll come again soon, little Gretchen. Papa will often take me with him, and then I'll bring you something pretty, much prettier than your little stones. Don't cry any more."

Poor child ! she so rarely saw a kindly, scarcely ever a childish face like her own ; the grimaces and rough laughter of old Jost were the only signs of gayety and good will to be met with among her surroundings. Even now the broom-maker knew no other way of consoling her, than to take her in his arms and say they would go and see the cows. Loving and docile as the poor creature was, she instantly strove to conquer her grief, but constantly turned her little head with a fresh burst of tears in the direction where her young friend had disappeared.

The high road was built in due time. Herr Berger came to the moorland to inspect the progress of the work, usually accompanied by Leo. Once he also brought his son Rudolph, but only once ; for the latter, three years older than his brother, was an active, restless little lad, and took no pleasure in the desolate monotony of the region. When he had watched the laborers a short time, and to the great joy of his father inquired with an interest far beyond his years, about their wages, their work, and the value and quality of the materials employed in road-building, he found the whole thing very tiresome, and afterwards always declined every invitation to drive to the new highway.

Leo, on the contrary, only needed to be asked ; spite of his extreme youth, the moorland had a certain poetic charm for him. He did not linger

near the workmen, watching their toil, but stood on the summit of some hillock, following with his eyes the play of the shadows cast by the clouds upon the uniform level, or lay at full length under the old beech tree, dreaming of the rustling of the forest of which it was the last sorrowful representative. When Autumn came he watched the bees which eagerly gathered around the blossoms of the heather and wild thyme, and thought of the stately lindens from whose fragrant blossoms they had gleaned honey a few months before, wondering whether the trees had lined the avenue of a stately castle or shaded the lowly roof of some peasant's cottage. He could lie for hours on the edge of one of the sluggish shallow streams that here and there flowed through the lowlands, watching the pebbles in their beds, or the stunted vegetation growing along their banks. But whatever else he might do, he never neglected to pay a visit to the broom-maker's hut. His principal attraction here was his interest in his little protégée, Margarethe; but he was also very fond of old Jost. The child was dear to him as a creature upon whom he could bestow favors. He bought her wheat rolls, cakes, a rattle, or a wooden doll, told her of beautiful great dolls she should have bye and bye, and taught her to repeat little verses she could not yet understand, but which she learned very quickly out of love for her young teacher. Old Jost, too, was not forgotten; Leo always

brought a little package of tobacco and begged him to tell some stories. Then came fearful tales of ghosts, whose relation before the boy was by no means in harmony with the pedagogue's anxieties, and these were often exchanged for waggish stories and jokes from the lives of buffoons and jesters, whose moral a conscientious instructor would perhaps have considered quite as doubtful as the ghost-stories. Leo, however, received no injury from them, although Eulenspiegel's strange shoemaker's work sometimes came between the lines of his reader, or the ghost from the giant's grave unexpectedly appeared in one corner of the school room bench.

The highway was completed, but Herr Berger always drove out to it several times a year because he had undertaken to keep it in repair, and Leo invariably accompanied him to visit his friends in the hut. If Berger's drives to the moorland occurred at too long intervals, the boy availed himself of a holiday as often as possible to pay a visit to the broom-maker and his foster child, accompanied by some schoolmate who was fond of walking. But he seldom succeeded in persuading one of his play-fellows to go with him more than once; they usually declared it was not worth while to go so far to see an ugly, delapidated hut, a cross old peasant woman, and a little child; and thought the stories written by the author of the "Easter Egg," far more entertaining than old

Jost's. Leo could not contradict them, but he liked little Gretchen far better than all the bright, pretty, clever children he saw in the city; and the incredible, sometimes nonsensical stories related by his old friend, as he sat in the midst of the heather, had far greater charms for him than all the books he possessed. He would not have been able to give himself any reason for this singular taste, but he did not think of asking for one. As he grew larger and more enterprising, he no longer invited any one to share his walks; he found far greater pleasure in his patronage of Margarethe and his admiration for the oratorical talent of the old broom-maker, when there were no jesters or doubters to disturb him.

CHAPTER II.

A BROKEN HEART.

ABOUT the time that Leo first became acquainted with Jost's little foster daughter, two ladies, mother and daughter, were seated in the spacious drawing room of a large handsome house in H——, engaged in earnest conversation. The mother, a still beautiful woman of middle age, was carefully, almost richly dressed; her features were soft and gentle, and her whole appearance expressed tenderness and winning cordiality. She was sitting before her work table at one of the flower adorned windows, busied with some embroidery, and although eagerly talking to her daughter, and attentively listening to her replies, her soft white hands did not pause a moment in their pleasant task.

But how little the daughter resembled her handsome mother! She too was beautiful, and had the same tall slender figure, whose exquisite outlines

were unmistakable despite the negligent dress and attitude in which she leaned back in one corner of the sofa. Her hair was so soft and fair, her eyes so blue and gentle, that one almost wondered at the form and expression of her features; for their perfect regularity, and the coldness and pride visible in them, seemed by no means in harmony with her softer charms. Another circumstance also lessened the pleasure which the sight of her beauty would otherwise have afforded. She was evidently ill; or was it some other cause that marked that line of suffering between the delicate eye-brows, drew down the corners of the mouth, and outlined the color in her fair cheeks so sharply?

The entrance of a pretty maid-servant interrupted the ladies' conversation: "Frau Regierungsrathin, Geheimrathin Ladner," she announced.

"You are very welcome," said the older lady, as she hastily advanced to receive her visitor. Her daughter, however, rose slowly, caught up a piece of needlework that lay on the table before her as if she had been employed upon it, and then turned, with a suppressed sigh, towards the door to greet the entering guest.

The latter was a very loquacious, gossiping person; after many inquiries about Fraulein Helene's health, and assurances of her sincere regret that she was no better, she passed on to the latest city news, and thus at last reached the fact, which in the opinion of the mother and daughter, she had

come especially to communicate. "What was it I wanted to ask?" said she. "Ah!—yes—do you remember that officer who was quartered in your house at the last great parade, my dear Regierungsrathin?"

"Certainly; it was scarcely three years ago. We had two officers in the house: General von S—— and his adjutant, young Count Steinthal."

"And both," said Helene, on whose cheeks the Geheimrathin thought she perceived a slight heightening of the feverish flush, "both were very estimable men."

"Well, my dear young lady, opinions are somewhat divided. Many say the general is very haughty."

"He may be so," replied Helene, calmly. "This, however, is certain: we never saw anything of it while he was an inmate of our house."

"I don't doubt it, Fraulein Helene, I don't doubt it in the least. But I did not intend to speak particularly of him, I alluded to the young man, Count Steinthal. Have you heard any news of him lately?"

"Just after he left here," replied Helene's mother, "he exchanged several letters with my husband; but as usual in such correspondences, it gradually died out. I really cannot say whether the Count or my husband wrote last; but we have heard nothing from him for a long time."

"Ah! then I can tell you a piece of news," said

the Geheimrathin hastily, as if she feared some one might anticipate her and be the first to communicate the weighty intelligence. "The Count was married a few days ago to a distant cousin, Fraulein von Metelen. They say she is very beautiful; and it is certain that she is rich—her brothers are dead, and she is the sole heiress of all the family property, which is very large."

Every tinge of color faded from Helene's cheek for a moment, but the change was so instantaneous that even the keenly observant newsmonger doubted whether the young girl had really turned pale; all the more so when, almost before she had fairly ceased speaking, Helene replied in a clear, firm voice: "I am very glad to hear Count Steintal has obtained a rich wife; for I fear his own circumstances are somewhat straitened, and he has not the least idea how to deny himself anything."

"Well," observed the Regierungsrathin, "that is usually the case with young men in his position in society."

"Very likely, mamma; but papa thought he was entirely too extravagant."

"Fraulein von Metelen probably judges him more leniently, since she has ventured to make him the possessor of her hand and fortune. The wedding was magnificent, and the bride's toilette costly and elegant beyond description. Fraulein von Stock, the daughter of Colonel von Stock in

M—— writes my Elise that she never was present at so superb an entertainment.”

“So Fraulein von Stock went to the wedding,” said Helene. “Oh! mamma, if we could only have such a brilliant wedding in H——! Nothing ever happens here, nothing at all. I almost think that people get sick out of pure *ennui*.”

“Helene,” said her mother reprovingly, “I don’t like to hear you say such things, even in jest. Those who really have a sincere desire for employment never lack suitable occupation; busy people never suffer from *ennui*.”

“Ah! Frau Geheimrathin,” cried Helene laughing, “mamma is scolding me because I have not finished her cap; but I will try to make amends for my fault. Look, mamma, I shall have it done before supper time.”

However sharply the Geheimrathin might watch, whatever dangerous subjects she touched upon, Helene did not betray by the slightest sign anything that could confirm her suspicions of a previous understanding between the young girl and Count Steinthal, and she at last went away very much out of humor that she had not succeeded in making the discovery for which she had set out.

As soon as the Regierungsrathin and her daughter were once more alone, Helene sank back in her corner so pale and exhausted that even a far less sympathizing heart than her mother’s must have been touched with the deepest compassion. The

young girl had lost all composure, all self-control. She trembled in every limb, wrung her hands, and stammered with quivering lips: "Lost!—forgotten!—abandoned! Oh, mother, this, the fate of the most miserable creatures is your daughter's destiny!"

"My child, my poor dear child," whispered the mother, who was striving to restrain her tears, "do not allow it to affect you thus, do not be so utterly overwhelmed! We have long foreboded this, nay, we have almost expected it as a certainty; how can you be so completely crushed by what we have long foreseen?"

"Mother, I have perceived in this bitter hour, what, until to-day, I refused to acknowledge even to myself: I was foolish enough to still cherish hope."

"Hope—dear Helene, it is no folly to cling to such a sweet, gentle consoler; do not renounce her. I will not say that these memories will become totally blotted out, but they will grow fainter; you will become calmer, will once more find joy in the love of your parents and brothers, and even in life itself. Perfectly happy, I fear you will never be again; but you will have strength to shut out all recollections of the past, to turn your gaze towards a peaceful, quiet future, and once more cling to life."

"No, mother, I shall never do that again; I have not cherished such a belief even for a moment.

The sole hope I had was fixed on him—I confess it to you and to myself with the deepest shame—and it has proved as false and treacherous as he. I have now but one desire left: to be permitted to die; and one longing, consuming wish, which can never be gratified: to be once more united to my poor, forsaken child.” Her voice faltered, Helene was struggling with passionate tears but she resolutely forced them back. She dared not, would not weep, for nothing would have more plainly suggested the thought that her sufferings were entirely mental, than eyes bedimmed with tears.

Her mother sat opposite to her daughter in silence, unable to sooth her, and lacking courage to tell her in words that her one ardent desire was indeed impossible to fulfil. Thus the time passed in sorrowful silence until a step was heard on the staircase, and the Regierungsrathin anxiously exclaimed: “Here comes your father! Compose yourself, child!”

Helene started up. Her breast heaved, her cheeks flushed, and for a moment she struggled with an emotion that threatened to suffocate her. But she soon—at least outwardly—regained her self-command, and when her father entered the room, he found her in the quiet languid attitude of an invalid.

Regierungsrath Lorsberg was a stately man of powerful frame, in the very prime of life, with a firm, self-possessed demeanor, and a certain stern-

ness in his manner, which, however, did not strike one unpleasantly, but seemed well suited to his quiet, decided movements. He first greeted his wife with grave affection, and then saluted his daughter in a similar manner. "Still so industrious, dear Sophie?" he asked, "I think your mother shames you, Helene." As he spoke a smile flashed over his face, scarcely stirring his lips, but gleaming brightly in his earnest eyes. It gave him a strong resemblance to his beautiful daughter?

"I had that frightful pain in my chest to-day, papa; you know it always makes me a little lazy, and mamma is very indulgent."

A shadow clouded the father's face, and he paused for a moment before he said: "I have received a letter. Guess from whom?"

Both ladies thought of Count Steinthal, and changed color; the mother, with evident embarrassment, answered: "That is rather a difficult thing to guess. Perhaps from my brother?"

"No, I will tell you: from Professor Seemann."

Helene was silent, and a sudden dread checked the Regierungsrathin's words a moment; but she strove to compose herself sufficiently to ask with apparent interest: "Won't you tell us what your old friend writes?"

"You are not good at dissimulation, Sophie," replied the Regierungsrath, "your face betrays that you have already guessed the contents of the letter."

"He speaks of his son?"

"Yes, and renews his proposal for Helene's hand," replied the father, with more sternness in his tone than before.

Helene turned pale, and sat gazing straight before her in silence; her mother uttered a deep sigh.

"Well," asked the Regierungsrath still more harshly, "will you not condescend to give me an answer?"

"Father," stammered Helene imploringly, "I entreat you not to press this matter."

"What?" replied Herr Lorsberg, without any outburst of wrath it is true, but with a look and tone so stern and severe that it would have required stronger nerves than his poor daughter's to endure them. "Do you call it *pressing* when you are permitted to keep a worthy, estimable young man waiting for months for a reply to his honorable proposal, while a simple 'yes' or 'no' would relieve him from the most torturing suspense?"

"Oh! my dear father," cried Helene, "if I am allowed to reply with a simple 'yes' or 'no,' I will speak the latter with a thankful heart."

"What reason have you for your decision?" asked Lorsberg, turning slowly towards her with a deep flush upon his cheeks, and placing a strong emphasis upon every word. "Don't talk to me about want of love. and such childish folly. Why can you not love a man who is in every way so deserving of affection? Speak! You cannot answer? I hope that frivolous officer, that ruined

Count, does not stand in the way of my friend's noble son !”

“He does not, father ; he can no longer do so—he is married.”

“Married ?” exclaimed the young girl's father, and at this moment his friend's son was forgotten, he now felt only for his daughter. “Married ?” he repeated ; “and his promise, which I know is pledged to you and not yet restored to him ? My daughter's betrothed husband dares to wed another ? The dishonorable scoundrel ! If this will not rouse a man to vengeance—”

“Father, father,” interrupted his wife in mortal terror ; “calm yourself, I implore you. See, Helene is suffering more from your violence than—”

“Than that rascal's villainy ? No, Sophie, that cannot be. Anger can only wound ; but faithlessness poisons the heart.”

“But consider, dear Lorsberg ; Helene is ill—”

“Ill ? And why is she ill ? Whose fault is it, except that miserable scoundrel's, whom may my curse—”

“No, do not curse him, father,” said Helene. She was standing beside her father, trembling in every limb, and caught his uplifted hand. “I promise you that he shall no longer have the slightest influence upon my decision. How could he ? Ought I, can I think of him in any other way than as a dead criminal, whom we pardon, but despise.”

"There *my* daughter speaks," said Lorsberg, grasping and pressing her hand as if she were a man. "You are right. That is the stand you must take towards the deceiver. But, if you perceive this, I may also be allowed to hope that Friedrich Seemann to the great joy of his father and myself, will soon succeed to the privileges of your faithless lover."

"Father," pleaded Helene, "see how ill I am, and have patience until there is a change in me. Will it not be better even for Seemann himself, to wait for my consent until I am well, or till death forbids it?"

Angrily—yes with positive anger—he now looked at the feeble, drooping creature before him whose words had roused a fear which he had hitherto always endeavored to crush down. But what he read in the pale face did not permit him to express to her the feelings that tortured and angered him. He turned away, and walked up and down the room with firm, steady steps, until he had conquered himself sufficiently to be able to speak calmly. Then he cast a reproachful glance at his weeping wife, and said to Helene: "It ought not to be; but we easily spoil a sick child, and then it becomes obstinate. You shall have your own way this time. See that you get perfectly well again, then we will talk of your future. Next month your mother shall take you to Ems, and I hope,

“nay, I am sure that you will come back with all your old roses.”

The mother took Helene to Ems, but the springs had no healing power. When her father saw her on her return all hope disappeared. It would have been vain—the first snows of Winter fell on his daughter’s grave. She parted from life with difficulty; the struggle was a severe one, for she left a heavy care behind. Her mother was alone with her in her last hours, and when she closed her dying eyes, whispered, in spite of her own agony: “Thank God.”

Her mother’s only brother came to poor Helene’s funeral. He was an elderly, childish widower, and the dead girl had been very dear to him. When he stood beside the corpse with his sister, his mild, calm eyes filled with tears, and he said in a trembling voice: “Ah! Sophie, how natural it is for you to mourn her so bitterly; I have scarcely ever grieved so sorely as to-day, not even when we buried our dear mother. Sweet Helene!—she was such a dear, bright girl—Ah! that we should lose her so early! It would be such a consolation to you and all of us, if she had at least been spared until she was married and had left us a child, her dear little image; alas! that she must die unmarried.”

“Yes, she died unmarried,” faltered the unhappy mother. “Yet thank God that He has taken her to Himself,” she added inaudibly.

CHAPTER III.

MARRIED FOR MONEY.

FROM the house of the distinguished government official we take the reader to a stately castle, the residence of a still more influential man. The time of its erection, as the exterior plainly shows, dates back to the feudal ages. Standing upon a beautiful, luxuriant wood-land meadow, on the shore of a clear lake, the walls of the various buildings have that peculiar greyish tint which only the lapse of centuries can bestow upon the dwellings of men. It has its gateways and towers, its gables and balconies, its lofty chimneys, and various quaint projections, and is provided with secret doors and draw-bridges.

The castle is very beautiful, and seems almost conscious of its own charms, so brightly is it mirrored in the waters of the lake at its feet. But it is a haughty beauty, always the same, whether it

stands bathed in smiling peaceful sunlight, or darkened by approaching storms, alike when its delicate lines of architecture are sharply relieved against the winter snows, and when Spring adorns the surrounding region with flowers and foliage.

It is Spring-time now. The forests on the verge of the meadow wear their "crowns of glory," to use the striking words of the poet, and in the old French garden at one side of the castle, the bright buds and blossoms of May toss their heads, and fill the air with fragrance. Countless birds twitter from their nests among the dense ivy that shrouds the corner of the western tower; the swan sails across the lake with outspread wings to protect his mate brooding over her nest on the shore, from any threatening danger; the sunlight is so bright and warm, the shade of the two rows of huge linden trees that line the castle avenue so cool and refreshing, that one would suppose that no heart could dwell here and not rejoice in the exquisite freshness and mildness of the day. But no; here, too, there are souls which, amid all the beauty and majesty of nature are wholly insensible to her influence.

In one of the spacious apartments of the castle were two men, who conversed together in low tones, in the intervals between long pauses when each was absorbed in his own thoughts. One was young and of powerful frame, the other stood upon the threshold of old age; but there was so striking a resem-

blance in the form and expression of the features, as well as in their bearing and gestures, that one would instantly suppose them to be father and son. Both had the same erect figure, the same slow manner of moving the hand and head, and the same indifferent, reserved expression. The older man's face betrayed more craft than benevolence; but the younger's expression would have been better, were it not for the disgust and weariness visible in his countenance. Neither looked at the beautiful landscape, they did not even raise their eyes to the windows outside of which the sunbeams were weaving a radiant network over forest and lake; the old man gazed at the gold snuff-box in his hand, and the young man fixed his eyes upon the inlaid floor.

They had already spent many hours in uncomfortable silence, or short, hastily interrupted snatches of conversation; for they had been sitting in the same apartment since daybreak, and now the evening shadows were beginning to lengthen. They had scarcely left the room in which they had passed this weary day a single half hour to take a hasty meal, and their solitude had only been interrupted at rare intervals by the appearance of a servant. They seemed to be waiting in eager expectation for some event of importance to both, and yet it was evident that the leaden weight of weariness weighed more heavily upon the younger than anxiety or care. At last he seemed to find the

burden unendurable, started up with a sudden movement, as if he were violently bursting a chain, and said: "I am going to take a little ride, father."

"*Mon Dieu*, Carl, what are you thinking of?" exclaimed the other in astonishment. "It is impossible, *mon cher*."

"Impossible? With the loveliest weather in the world, and horses only waiting to be saddled?"

"But, *mon enfant*, we are expecting the announcement of the much desired event every moment, and nothing could be more unseemly than for you not to be present to receive the news."

"Unseemly? Good Heavens, we are in the country. There is no one here but the servants, and the Miltenberg doctor, who will be no great stickler for etiquette."

"No, it is not that, but your wife. She would never forgive you if she should ask for you, and you were away from home."

"Do you suppose she *will* ask for me, papa?" said the young man, bitterly, fixing his heavy eyes so steadily upon his father's that the latter involuntarily turned his head away.

"Why, Carl, it would be very natural if she should inquire for you in this anxious hour."

"It would be, papa, if our other relations were natural; but you know very well that is not the case."

"*Mon Dieu*, Carl, *quelle folie!* Your relations

with your wife unnatural! For God's sake don't say that; for even if it were so, whose fault would it be but your own?"

"Mine, father? you know better. Or was it natural that I, a man scarcely twenty-seven, should ask the hand of Therese, who is ugly, ill-tempered and almost ten years older? Was it natural that I should sacrifice freedom, life, my whole future happiness, to a cousin so repulsive to me?"

"No, *cher enfant*, that certainly would not be natural; but you did nothing of the kind."

"I did not, father!" exclaimed the young man with an outburst of anger. What, do you make sport of my misery? Have I not been her husband a year?"

"Certainly, Carl, that is perfectly true; I only disputed the assertion that you had sacrificed to her your youth, your future, and other treasures. You did nothing of the sort; for if you have really made any sacrifice, you thought in so doing very little of your *charmante cousine*, but far more of the broad lands and large possessions she would bestow with her—I admit—somewhat thin and yellow hand."

"But, father, did I take this 'thin, yellow hand' cheerfully, of my own free will?"

"Why, *cher enfant*, you were twenty-seven years old, long past your majority, when you married; so it is evident that no one could force you to do so."

"No, not as we compel a little child, by hunger and blows; but you will not deny that there is a moral constraint far more powerful, and that you pitilessly exercised it upon me."

"I should not have expected you to use such words towards your father, Carl, at the very hour when you are expecting the birth of an heir. If I persuaded you to listen to reason, was it not for your own advantage? If I called your attention to the ruin towards which you were inevitably rushing without your cousin's saving hand, whose ruin did I seek to avert? was it not your own? If I furthermore called your attention to the disgrace which threatened our name, did I utter even *one* word which was untrue or exaggerated? You know as well as I that it was the most urgent necessity which induced you to make this marriage."

"But how was I brought into this urgent need? Was it not through you, father?"

"Not entirely, *mon ami*. The estates of the Steinthal family were very much embarrassed when they came to me, and your mother's fortune proved much smaller than I expected. The times were difficult and unsettled, I was obliged to live in a style befitting my rank, and you, my son, spent much more money than was at all necessary. Thus it was really only partly my fault that a wealthy marriage became still more important for you than for me. Besides, you can congratulate

yourself that you were not deceived in your wife's income, as was the case with me; so I don't see why you should reproach me for a thing which was done solely for yourself, and your own advantage."

"You forget, father, that my mother was as beautiful and lovely as Therese is ugly and disagreeable. But enough of this; I would endure all without complaint if my conscience did not ceaselessly torture me with the bitterest upbraidings."

"I don't exactly understand you, Carl. How can your conscience upbraid you for having resolved to marry your—well, I confess it—somewhat elderly cousin, and save our ancient, noble house from disgrace and ruin? It is certainly the most sensible and advantageous thing you ever did in your life."

"I admit the matter might be justified from that point of view, if I had been free; but bound by the most sacred ties as I was—"

"What am I to understand by that? *You* bound by sacred ties?" the old count hastily interrupted, in evident alarm. "I hope you have not been such a fool as to allow yourself to be enticed into a secret marriage with that government official's daughter."

"No, father, it is not that; I have not been enticed; it was only my own passionate love for the hapless girl that drew me on. If the word

seduction can be used in relation to such circumstances, I was the seducer, although I never thought of making Helene—of making her wretched.”

“But what do you mean by talking about sacred ties, *mon garcon?*” asked the father in a tone of relief. It was certainly very commendable that you did not intend to injure the girl.”

“But I have done so, nevertheless. Ah! father, you surely know how unutterably wretched I have made her, yet you pretend to think that I can be calm with the ever present thought of the hopeless misery into which I have plunged such a lovely creature.”

“Well, Carl, I don’t merely pretend, I really think if you were a sensible man you would not turn grey in grieving over an old, forgotten tale. How many men of aristocratic families do you suppose there are, who ever marry ladies of equal rank without having had previous entanglements? Most of them, too, have gone as far as yours. They settle these little affairs and forget them; *voilà tout*. I myself have—but who is that? Ah! Frau Schonfeld. Well, how is the countess?”

The elderly woman to whom the count addressed these words, was Countess Steinthal’s waiting maid. She curtsied repeatedly, and with an agitated face and excited manner congratulated the two gentlemen on the birth of a daughter and grand-daughter.

“But, *mon Dieu*,” exclaimed the old count, “isn’t it a boy?”

“God bless the child,” said his son half under his breath, and left the room, while his father slowly followed him.

At the bedside of his wife, who at his entrance had betrayed little of the emotion, the affectionate cordiality which usually fills the heart of a young mother when she meets her husband at such an hour—at the bedside of this cold, repellant dame, stood young Count Steinthal, kissing his little daughter with bitter though hidden tears. He was thinking of another sick-bed, of the sufferings of another whom he had wronged;—that it had become a death-bed he did not yet know. Before his mind’s eye appeared a cradle, and within it a little, forsaken child. Where did the cradle stand? Who had charge of the poor little creature? he knew not, he had not been able to ascertain; nothing was left for him but to think with consuming longing of the child whose mother he had loved. But the eyes that rested on the little daughter of his unloved wite, were filled with remorse for the past, rather than with the joy of a new-made father.

CHAPTER IV.

MARGARETHE'S FIRST TRIAL.

WITH the inevitable progress of time, Count Steintal's two daughters grew to maturity. Louise, the daughter of his aristocratic wife, in her parent's castle; Margarethe, Helene's forsaken child, in the hut of the broom-maker, Jost. Neither of them knew of the other's existence, and they never met, of course; for the circles in which they lived were as widely distant and dissimilar as the rank and fortune which had fallen to the lot of each. An equal difference, of course, existed in the education and the mental and moral development of the two young girls; yet the sisters, wholly unknown to each other, were strikingly alike in outward appearance. Both resembled their father, Count Steintal, but both in many respects were also remarkably like Margarethe's beautiful mother, a fact which no one as yet had been able to notice.

One Spring afternoon, as warm and bright as the day on which Leo Berger had seen little Margarethe for the first time, the latter was sitting

under the cherry tree in her foster father's miserable garden. The young girl was entirely alone; there was not a soul in the house or anywhere near the wretched dwelling. Nature, which in the brightest hours of the year was gay and alluring even here, was her sole companion. Thousands of bees were humming above her head around the white blossoms of the tree; the lilacs that Leo had planted at the entrance of the little garden, waved their fragrant clusters in the sunlight, and the merry song of the finches echoed from the slender birches which had grown up beside the thicket of stunted firs. It was Sunday, so Margarethe held a book in her hand instead of work, but she was not reading; there was too much joy and beauty around her, for her to be able to turn her gaze away. Her clear blue eyes wandered with an expression of the most heartfelt delight, from the blossom-crowned tree, over to the green corn-fields, to the birches, and the warbling birds, and to the bed where the primroses were blooming; and at last, as if she must give her happy mood some positive expression, she burst into a little song, which sounded as bright and gay as the trilling notes of the finches.

Under cover of the singing a step approached entirely unheard, and she did not notice that any one had entered the garden until a hand was laid on her shoulder and a pleasant voice said: "Good evening, Margarethe. Are you so very happy?"

"Good evening, Leo! Am I very happy? how can you ask? Is it not Sunday and May-day both? I am all alone in the house, for mother has gone to church and father to M——. I was sitting here in the garden thinking how beautiful the world is, and how it grows more beautiful every day, and suddenly I began to sing all by myself, to vie with the birds."

"All by yourself," repeated Leo. "Yes, you always do everything good and beautiful all by yourself."

"Oh, no," said Margarethe, with a shade of embarrassment; "you think too well of me. I really ought to be reading the prayer book because it is Sunday; but I did not get very far and have been looking at the fields and flowers instead, and paying more attention to the bees and Summer birds than to the book. But, Leo," she added apologetically, "I have been thinking of God amid it all."

"I am sure of that, Margarethe. But didn't you say that Jost had gone to M——? How strange! he generally goes no farther than the church at B—— on Sundays."

"Yes, it is strange," replied Margarethe with a merry laugh; "you will think so when I tell you the reason. Father has gone to M—— to-day to get his wheelbarrow; for, as we drove home from there yesterday in a carriage, we couldn't bring it with us." As she uttered the words she rocked

herself gleefully to and fro, rubbing her hands like a joyous child.

“You drove home in a carriage?” said Leo in astonishment. “How did that happen, Margarethe?”

“Yes, you may well ask, Leo. It made plenty of stir when we returned here. Hu—wasn’t mother bewildered? but father Jost didn’t care much for that, and it was so delightful.”

“But tell me how it happened, Margarethe.”

“Why, it was all very simple. You know all through April, it did nothing but snow, hail, and rain, so that everybody who wasn’t obliged to go out, remained quietly at home. Father did not go to M—— with his brooms after the middle of March, but just on account of the bad weather, the people used twice as many as usual. They told us the mud was ankle deep in the streets and yards, and the door-steps were not much better. Father now had a large stock of brooms, so he packed his wheelbarrow full, I took an immense bundle on my back, and we walked to M—— yesterday morning when the sun was quite high, but the earth still sparkling brightly with dew. Now you know, Leo, father is very clever—” she paused and looked at her young friend with an air of such roguish expectation, that he instantly gave her the pleasant assurance: “To be sure, Margarethe, there are not many men like Jost.”

She nodded gaily, and continued: “yes, that is

true; father soon noticed that the market for brooms was very good; he raised his price, and before noon we sold them all and obtained more than four thalers—just think of it, more than four thalers! It was too much; we could scarcely believe it.”

“But what has that to do with the carriage?” asked Leo, involuntarily joining in the laugh of his gay companion.

“You shall hear. What are we to do with all this money? asked father Jost; and I advised him to buy mother a neck-handkerchief, and the two young women—father’s daughters, you know—each an apron. We did so, but still had nearly three thalers left. Then father Jost said it was an enormous amount of money, and we must do something for our own pleasure. We stood before the shop windows in great perplexity, and it suddenly occurred to me that the teacher was doubtless right when he told us that the rich were often more unhappy than the poor. I wouldn’t believe it before, but now I understand that people may be badly off when they have so much money that they don’t know what to do with it.”

“Your misfortune probably did not last long, Margarethe.”

“No; an accident came to our assistance. A carriage, such as wealthy merchants use, passed us; it belonged to Herr Hagendorf, and his wife and daughter, beautiful Fraulein Emma, were lean-

ing back among the soft cushions. I involuntarily said: 'If only one could ride just once in such a carriage.'"

"Aha! and they asked you to get in? Do you know them, Margarethe?"

"They did not ask us to get in; but I know them very well; their cook often buys of us. But father now knew what to do. 'Yes, Gretchen,' he cried, 'you shall have that pleasure; you shall ride home in a coach, and I will sit beside you. We have carried and pushed many dozens of brooms to M——; now, for once, a pair of fast horses shall take us back.' He ran to a livery stable so fast that I could scarcely follow him; and when I came up with the wheelbarrow, which he had forgotten in his haste, he had already made a bargain with the man. A pair of horses were harnessed into a light open carriage, and the wheelbarrow was pushed into one of the stalls until father could come for it; we got in, and drove like the wind through the streets, between the tall houses, and over the bridge to the gate, past gardens and fields, and across the moor, on the highway your father built. When we turned off by the great beech tree, and drove here over the old sandy road, the carriage rocked gently to and fro; if it had lasted much longer I should have fallen asleep, and dreamed Heaven knows what visions of splendor and magnificence."

Margarethe paused and gazed dreamily before

her, still strangely excited by the memory of a pleasure so unusual as a ride in a carriage. Leo watched her earnestly a few moments, and then asked: "So you enjoyed the drive?"

"Yes, Leo, very much. It is delightful to get to a place without any effort, to sit up among the soft cushions and be able to gaze so far around you on every side, see towers and trees approach and disappear, and feel the fresh air blowing in your face."

"Then you would like to drive often, Gretchen?"

"Often? Oh, yes. But if you ask me whether I should prefer to be compelled always to ride or always to walk, I should choose the latter."

"Why, Margarethe?"

"Because we lose so many beautiful things when we rush by them so rapidly and noisily. A nightingale was singing in a garden near M——, but I could scarcely hear a note on account of the rattling of the wheels. Yesterday morning I saw a quantity of forget-me-nots growing by the wooden bridge at the mill; I intended to gather them on my way home to make a wreath for my picture of the Virgin—it is Mary's month—but I was obliged to leave them when we passed the spot. I was very sorry, and I must say though I should like very well to ride sometimes, I should far, far more often, prefer to walk on my own feet."

"Dear Margarethe," said Leo softly, as he gently stroked her soft, wavy hair, whose glossy wealth

floated down beneath her little red calico cap. His dark, eloquent eyes rested upon her calm face with an expression of the most ardent affection, as he continued: "Dear Margarethe! would to God I might be permitted to gratify all your little innocent wishes. But who can tell what this approaching separation may bring us?"

"Separation?" she interrupted breathlessly. Are you speaking of another longer separation than the absence of a few weeks?"

"Yes, Margarethe," he answered sadly, "I must go to England to spend at least two years; I cannot see you while there, and we shall be separated from each other during all that time."

"Separated from each other!" faltered the young girl, turning away—alas, not to look at the finches on the birch trees. Leo called her repeatedly by name; she turned towards him, but without raising her downcast eyes. But an instant before, her face had been a picture of bright repose; now it was quivering with the reflection of her first great sorrow, battling with a violent but perfectly useless effort to appear calm.

"Do not grieve, Margarethe," continued Leo. "These two years will certainly be hard for us, but then we shall meet again and be happy—far happier than now."

"Who can tell, Leo?" You say yourself, who knows."

"Ah! my dear Margarethe," replied the young

man with forced calmness, "that will depend entirely upon you. If you do not forget me, if you remain as good and gentle, and live as retired a life as you do now, we shall certainly meet again with joy."

"I don't understand you, Leo. How could I ever change or forget you?"

"I do not fear it, child, but others think it might be so. Therefore you must promise me to avoid the peasant girls and lads whom you meet on your way to church, as much as possible, and spend your time with Jost, his daughter Katharine, who is a worthy, quiet woman, and little Anne at Nordhecke."

"I promise."

"I will send books which you can understand, and from which you will learn many things. Will you read them as often and as much as you can?"

"I will do so gladly."

"Another thing, my dear Margarethe; you must not go to the market town again with Jost; I will speak to your foster-father about it; now you have grown so tall, it is not proper for you to do so."

"No, Leo; but—but—"

"Did you wish to ask me anything?"

"Why must you go to England?"

"My father wishes it."

"Then of course you must obey him. But why must you remain there such a long, such a terribly

long time? Will it not be sad for your father to be parted from you so long?"

"Certainly; but he thinks the journey necessary for my future advantage."

"Good Heavens! I can't understand it. What are you to do in England?"

"You cannot understand it all, therefore try to console yourself by the thought that, in taking this journey, I am obeying my father's positive commands. Yet perhaps you can understand that I am going to England to perfect my knowledge of manufactures."

"Yes, I understand that," said Margarethe with an expression of joy; for to the grief of parting with her best friend was added the painful feeling of total ignorance of the reason for this step, which seemed to cost him so much self-denial. "I understand that; for you have already told me so much about these wise, clever Englishmen, their huge ships, their restless activity, and their numerous manufactures."

"And you have been a good scholar, and remembered it all very well. What a treasure of learning you will possess when I come back, and when you have read again and again the books I shall send you. Only, amid all your knowledge, don't forget your first teacher,—Leo."

"How can I do that? Will not every word I read remind me of you, to whom I owe the art, who gave me books to practice it? Would this

miserable spot of ground ever have been a garden, without the toil and industry you bestowed upon it? Who planted that tree, those flowers? From whom came the pictures on the walls of my room, and the book from which I pray? Oh! Leo, Leo, what should I be without you, and what will become of me if you leave me these long, long years?"

She burst into tears; tears rare to this child of nature, who, satisfied with the few and simple pleasures her lot afforded, hardly knew the names of care and sorrow. But now they came with overpowering violence, the young girl sobbed bitterly and inconsolably. This grief surprised Leo, who had scarcely seen her weep since her earliest childhood, and vainly he sought for some means of consolation. After a time, however, she checked her tears; in a strong, artless mind there is no desire for pain, no sickly longing to appear the heroine of a tragedy; the instinctive desire for happiness, inherent in every human soul, asserts its power most strongly in the purest natures, which, before they yield to sorrow, bravely struggle to rob it of its sharpest sting.

Margarethe rose, dried her tears, and said with unexpected firmness: "You must obey your father, Leo; it is your duty. Since, for your future welfare, he is willing to make the sacrifice of parting with you for so long a time, it would be ungrateful if you did not make it easy for him by cheerful obedience,

and I should be guilty of worse than ingratitude if I allowed myself to make your heart heavy. No, I will not do that; besides, it won't be quite so bad as I thought at first. Although England is so far away, and the ocean divides it from our native country as you have shown me, ships and letters pass from land to land. I shall often hear from you, Leo, very often while you are away, shall I not?" As he maintained a sorrowful silence, she again asked half confidently, half impatiently: "Shall I not?"

"No, my poor child;" replied Leo with a deep sigh, "it cannot be, I can send you no messengers."

"Of course you can't," she answered, trying to smile. "I didn't mean that you were to send messengers; but you can certainly write letters."

"Alas! I have been compelled to promise my father to write to no one but himself and my brother," he whispered in a faltering voice.

"Did your father wish this?" she asked, turning pale.

"Yes, he demanded it."

"Oh! that is very hard, hard and bitter for me!" she clasped her hands over her eyes.

"Margarethe," said Leo soothingly, "is it not equally hard for me to receive no letters from you? I cannot do that either."

"No, no! it is not so bad. What could I write to you! Why should you be anxious about me? Nothing ever happens to me, and I shall not be

sick; I am always well. What should I have to tell? What I am doing, and how I toil to learn something for love of you, you already know. And how the moorland looks at this and that season of the year, by day and by night, you can always imagine; for you are as familiar with it as I—But you, you! How shall I know whether there was not a storm upon the ocean when you crossed it? And may not the foggy air of that foreign land make you ill? may not care and vexation come upon you among strangers? And I shall know nothing of it, neither your joys or sorrows, life or death. Oh! how can your father be so merciless!”

“Gretchen, he does not know that it grieves you thus, and he wishes me to devote myself solely and entirely to the object for which I make the journey.”

“It must be a very important object—far more important than I can understand. But he who requires all this of you is your father; you must yield to his wishes in everything that is right—I understand that, I must try to reconcile myself to it, and I will. Alas! my only comfort will be in thinking of you and praying for you.”

While Margarethe, in her struggle with the first deep sorrow she had ever known, was thus betraying her innocent heart to her young protector, he was striving with far less pure, more bitter feelings. “Why does my father separate me so pitilessly from this sweet child?” he said to himself. “Why

will he not leave me to take care of my own happiness? Where could I find a fairer future than by the side of this pure-hearted, lovely creature? Very well, I will yield to his wishes now, but when I return from England—”

Margarethe's exclamation, “there comes father Jost,” interrupted this train of thought. Both rose and went forward to meet the old man.

“Good evening,” cried the broom-maker, who was evidently in a good-humor. “Here I am, and the old wheelbarrow too; but we'll soon take it to M—— with another load. What do you say to that, Gretchen? Didn't you have a splendid ride yesterday, sitting upon the high seat in that carriage?”

“Yes, father, it was very pleasant.”

“Very pleasant? and she pipes it out like a sick bird! You have red eyes, too. What's the matter, Grete? has your mother been cross?”

“Mother hasn't returned from B—— yet; she has probably stopped at Katharine's.”

“Deuce take it, what has happened then? You've been crying, and that's something you haven't done for years. I hope you haven't been hurting my Grete's feelings, sir.”

“And yet that is just what I have done, Jost, although sorely against my will.”

Jost looked fairly stupefied. He stared steadily at Leo, pushed his woolen cap over one ear, and scratched the other.

"I will tell you about it, Jost, to rouse you from your dream," continued Leo. "I must leave the country for two years in order to obtain a thorough knowledge of business; my father wishes it, so I came here to take leave of you and Margarethe; that is why she is so sad."

"And no wonder," said Jost with a very downcast mein. "You were her playmate when she was little, and like a brother as she grew older. She has wandered over the moor and studied with you. If Ann'-Trine was cross you comforted her, and if I told her a funny story you helped her laugh at it. And now all this must be over. I'm sorry for the poor child and for myself."

"Why, it isn't over forever, Jost. Don't make the child's heart heavier than is necessary. I shall return in two years, and then—"

"No sir," interrupted the broom-maker, shaking his head; "you won't come back."

"For heaven's sake, father," cried Margarethe; "do you think he will die on the journey?"

"No, no, child, not that; God forbid. With His aid he will come home from the foreign country. Yes, yes, he will come back to D—— to his father's house,—but he won't find the road to the moorland again, depend upon it."

"You are mistaken, Jost!" exclaimed Leo angrily; and almost in the same breath, Margarethe asked: "Why not, father?"

"Because during all that long time he'll forget

it, and learn to go over other paths he'll like better. Yes, young master, that's the way it will be, though you don't believe it now. But your father, who knows the world and men, better than you, foresees it, and is very well satisfied. That's the very reason he sends you to England."

"What put such ideas into your head, Jost?"

"Haven't I hit it about right? I can't blame your father either. Everybody in the world belongs to the spot which Our Lord has assigned to him; I and my family belong out here on the moorland among the juniper bushes and heather; but it is not fit for you. Your place is in your father's office, or the elegant rooms in his house; but you have been running out to the moor so often that the old gentleman is afraid you will stay here altogether; that's why he sends you away so far, and bids you stay so long that you won't find the way here any more."

"You are mistaken, Jost," repeated Leo, but more calmly than before. "Come into the house a moment, I want to speak to you; Margarethe, wait here until we return; you will go with me as far as the beech tree?"

She nodded an assent, and Leo went into the hut with Jost. He urged the old peasant most earnestly to take every care of Margarethe, and gave him a large sum of ready money, that in the absence of her young guardian, he might be able to supply all the little wants for which Leo had

hitherto provided; then he took an affectionate farewell of the old man, and left the house. Margarethe joined him, and they walked on to the old beech tree in silence.

When they reached it Leo paused, and held out his hand to the young girl with the simple words: "Farewell, child; keep well, and pray for me."

"Yes, Leo; night and day."

"I thank you; and now—may God watch over you!" he warmly pressed the trembling hand that lay heavily in his own, then let it fall and strode hastily along the path towards home, without casting another glance at the young girl. The parting was over; he would not make it more painful for her. But Margarethe stood still gazing after him until he disappeared in the distance.

Then she broke down and crouched under the tree for a long time, sobbing bitterly, until by the last faint glimmer of the fading twilight she saw the figure of a peasant woman coming across the moor. It was Ann'-Trine, and Margarethe rose, hurried back to the house to avoid her questions, and locked herself into her room, where she remained late into the night, kneeling before the picture of the Virgin which that very morning, in such a happy mood, she had adorned with the fairest flowers. She no longer wept, but in the dim light of the summer night gazed at the picture with swollen eyes, murmuring at intervals: "Oh! pitying mother, pray for us."

CHAPTER V.

A DYING WOMAN'S SECRET.

THE gas had not yet displaced the old oil lamps, which were trembling on their lofty posts under the rude assaults of a violent gale, and casting a very wavering, unsteady light over the deserted streets. Only a few dark forms glided by, hurrying to reach their homes as soon as possible; for who, in such weather, would remain out a moment longer than was necessary. But the storm still raged on in its former wild wrath, and committed all sorts of damages.

In one house standing on a wide street on the other side of the church, its rage was unheeded; another power was present: death was performing its work, quietly commenced, but now surely though slowly approaching completion. Poor Helene's mother was lying on her deathbed, with her husband and brother beside her. In the anxious suspense with which they listened to the invalid's feeble words, they had forgotten the howling of the tempest, and did not heed the in-

creased fury with which, after a short pause to collect its strength, it had again risen. The eyes of the two gentlemen were fixed intently upon the sunken features of the dying woman, who was speaking in faint, weary accents of a secret which duty and conscience alike forbade her to conceal.

"Do you remember the day you came to Helene's funeral, Adolph?" she said to her brother.

"How could I forget it? It was in the Autumn, and as dark and stormy a day as this has been. But you ought not to recall the memory of such painful scenes, dear Sophie."

"Why not, Adolph? They have no longer any shadow of grief for me, for with God's blessing, I shall soon be re-united to my lost child. Yet I did not wish to speak of my feelings at that time, but of your words. Do you remember them, brother?"

"Not distinctly, Sophie. I undoubtedly spoke of the dear child's lovable qualities and our grief at her loss; but I cannot recall the precise expressions I used."

"But they remain firmly fixed in my memory, for they pierced my soul like a two-edged sword."

"Good Heavens, sister, what could I have said to wound you so deeply?"

The sick woman, with a great effort, turned her head towards her husband and asked: "are we alone?"

"Yes, entirely alone, dear Sophie; you desired

even our sons to leave the room because you wished to speak to Adolph and me in private."

"Alas! it must be told; yes, it must be! Adolph said: 'It would be such a consolation to you and all of us if she had been spared long enough to marry and leave a child.' His concluding words were: 'Alas! that she must die unmarried.'"

"Yes," replied her brother, deeply agitated, "I now remember perfectly both your words and mine. You repeated in a tone full of despair: 'yes, she died unmarried.'"

"I said so," stammered the sick woman; "and I said it despairingly because Helene did not die childless—she left a daughter."

"Poor Sophie," said the Regierungsrath, bending over her anxiously, "her mind is wandering."

"No, replied her brother who had been watching her intently, "she seems to be fully conscious of what she is saying."

"It is as you say, Adolph," continued the invalid, "we have a granddaughter."

"Dear child," said her husband, greatly alarmed; "recollect yourself. We have three granddaughters and two grandsons."

"You are speaking of our son's children; but I was not thinking of them. I spoke of my poor Helene's daughter."

"Dear Sophie, do not torture yourself and me

with such fancies. Helene was not married; how could she have left a child?"

My mind is not wandering," replied the dying woman solemnly; "I assure you by all that is sacred—she had a child. It is still living, and I claim your care, Carl, your protection, Adolph, for the poor, forsaken creature."

"It is impossible, it cannot be!" exclaimed the Regierungsrath.

"I fear you are mistaken, Carl, I cannot help believing it. But in Heaven's name, Sophie, why have you kept this secret so long?"

"Ah!" moaned the invalid almost unintelligibly, "Helene was afraid of her father, and I, too, feared his pride and anger. The unfortunate child confided her desperate situation to me; I aided her to conceal the consequences of her false step—her shame and misery. Through Lisette, I provided for the child."

"Poor child! alas, poor child!" compassionately murmured the dying woman's brother. But the husband started up, and strode hurriedly up and down the room. At last he approached the bed and said in a hollow tone: "Wife, how you have deceived me! Yet why are you now so cruel as not to play your part to the end? Why did you not take this hideous secret with you to the grave, instead of robbing me of the blissful illusion that I might mourn for my dead daughter, and not curse her?"

“Oh! Carl, Carl, be merciful,” stammered the dying woman, and her brother added with reproachful earnestness: “Lorsberg, you are justifying the fears of your unhappy wife.”

The wretched man was about to yield to an outburst of passion; but as he turned towards his brother-in-law, his eyes fell upon the dying woman, and he was silenced by the presence of the long-dreaded, terrible moment; for a great change had taken place in the invalid. Lorsberg could not conceal from himself that her life was now numbered by minutes. The same warning was evident to her brother, and his kind heart quailed at the thought that his sister's agonizing confession had perhaps been made in vain, and her strength would fail before she had given any farther particulars about the deserted child, the surroundings amid which it had lived, and the name it bore. His fears were not groundless; the dying woman could only gasp: “Lisette—Lisette—knows—all.” Then her strength rapidly failed, her reason wandered, and when at midnight the tempest beat against the window panes with renewed violence, her spirit returned to the hands of its Creator.

Lisette, who had been Lorsberg's housekeeper for many years, was familiar with all the particulars, and ready to furnish the most exact information. She named the child's father, the place where it was born, the pastor who christened it, and had documents verifying the whole story,

which she willingly entrusted to her dead mistress' brother. She herself had visited the child in the rude asylum where it was concealed, at first monthly, then every two, and at last every three months, always under the pretext that she was looking after her sister's orphaned child, who lived in a little village only a short distance from Jost's cottage. The foster mother of Lisette's niece had also nursed Helene's child during the first year of its life, and had then taken it to the broom-maker's.

These inquiries had been made by Justizrath Greven, the brother of Lorsberg's dead wife, while the latter sat in silence with his face hidden in his hands. Lisette was undecided whether grief for the heavy loss he had sustained, sorrow for the fate of his unhappy daughter, or indignation at the disgrace she had brought upon his name, had the greatest share in the gloomy mood into which he had fallen. Probably all these causes combined to foster a bitterness in the proud man's soul, which was thenceforward to rule his whole nature, to his own torment and the sorrow of all who surrounded him.

After Lisette had related all she knew, and been dismissed, the two gentlemen remained for a long time sitting opposite to each other in oppressive silence; for the Justizrath thought he ought to leave the first words in relation to an event which so nearly concerned him, to the grandfather of the child whose existence they had learned so unexpectedly.

Lorsberg would not be the first to introduce the subject; he looked upon the affair in no other light than that of a deadly insult. There was far more anger than love in his thoughts of his scarcely dead wife and long departed daughter, and if a faint feeling of compassion for the dead stirred his heart, it was far too vague and powerless to be able to lessen the bitterness with which he thought of both.

After a long, painful pause, Greven at last asked: "What decision have you made about this lamentable affair, Lorsberg?"

These words tore the outer veil of apparent calmness from the gloomy sufferer; but if the former lull in the storm had been uncanny, the furious outburst of the tempest was still more terrible. "Decision," he exclaimed, raising his deeply flushed face with its flashing eyes and the swollen veins protruding upon the high forehead, towards his questioner, "what have I to decide? The disgraceful business does not concern me; my wife and her kindred have brought shame upon my honorable name—I renounce them forever."

Greven calmly rose and approached the furious man. "I can pardon much, in consideration of your surprise and grief," said he, "but I will not suffer you to slander my dead sister so unjustly. Sophie was always a true, faithful wife, and if a stain has unhappily fallen upon Helene, she was *your* daughter as well as hers."

This remark, undeniable as it was, only served to increase the fury of the Regierungsrath.

"Silence," he shrieked, striking the table with his clenched hand. "Had your sister fulfilled her duties as a mother, it could never have gone so far."

"You are unjust, Lorsberg, because you are determined to be so," replied Greven sternly. "Sophie did *before* Helene's unhappy, false step, what *we* have done since: trusted in the purity and virtue of her child."

"That is precisely where she did wrong," cried the obstinate Lorsberg. "One who is answerable for anything, should rely upon nothing but his own knowledge."

"It is not in the nature of pure, gentle hearts to be suspicious; that is a trait which belongs to stern, morose characters—but this discussion is useless; after the manner in which, beside my sister's scarcely lifeless body you have spoken of her and her kindred, the sooner we part the better."

"I will not detain you," said Lorsberg, in a cold, bitter tone.

"I understand you; but before I leave you, I have a duty to fulfil. My sister entrusted the care of Helene's child to me as well as to you; I must therefore ask a clear, plain answer to the question: how and in what manner will you share the charge?"

"I shall not trouble myself about the child in

any way," replied Lorsberg, turning towards his brother-in-law with a gesture that was almost insulting.

"Heartless and cruel as this decision is," said Greven, "I hail it as a favor; I shall henceforward assume alone the duties, and with them the rights of a father towards Helene's child."

"But do not venture to give the—to give it my name!" raved the Regierungsrath.

"I shall give it my own," replied Greven, and went into the next room, where his sister's body lay.

Lorsberg looked after him angrily for a moment, then threw himself into a chair, again buried his face in his hands, and remained in this attitude during the remainder of the night, a prey to the bitterest, most painful emotions. When, in the grey dawn, the storm lulled at last, and a bright, sunny, Autumn morning succeeded the wild, gloomy night, the unhappy man rose; but no peace followed the conflict in his heart; on the contrary, he had allowed a dark, evil resolution to mature—the resolution to revenge himself upon the destroyer of his domestic happiness, the thief of his honor.

Greven went from his sister's corpse to the housekeeper's room to consult with her once more, and then left his brother-in-law's house, never to enter it again. He too had formed resolutions but they were gentle, kindly ones, which would bring a blessing on himself and others.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE OF MARGARETHE'S FRIENDS.

IN the "Pearl of Days," the Scotch gardener's daughter speaks very charmingly of the advantages which Sunday, apart from its influence on the soul and mind, has in regard to the bodily wants of the lower classes of society. She does not allude to this so much in respect to the rest from hard labor which the holy day bestows, but rather to the preparations for a quiet, undisturbed solemnization of it, which are made the evening before. Any one who is familiar with the lives and labor, the care and toil of the poor, will instantly and joyfully agree with her. As a proof of this we will take the reader to the dwelling of lame Anna of Nordhecke, of whom Leo had spoken during his farewell visit to Margarethe, with the request that in his absence, his little friend would confine herself to her society.

Anna of Nordhecke, poor as she was, felt herself a personage of some importance in consequence of owning a farm. True, her whole estate con-

sisted only of a miserable little house with walls, which in many places, would have been greatly improved by laths and plaster. It was shaded in front by a row of six tall birch trees which Anna proudly called her "avenue," and a slender poplar stood at the stable door beside the little garden, whose black thorn hedge was not very thriving. In this garden was a clump of lilacs, a stunted apple tree, and an old pear tree, which never bore any fruit, but which was nevertheless a source of great satisfaction to the mistress of the garden. It was very tall and blossomed every year; when it did so no longer, Anna meant to have a handsome chest made of its tolerably large trunk. Besides this there were a few acres of sandy soil belonging to the little house, and the right to pasture a cow on the moor. With all these possessions little Anna considered herself peculiarly favored by fortune.

She would surely have been half starved if, with her lame hip, she had depended solely upon her farm for support; but this very infirmity had opened to her another means of support in addition to the income from her landed property. Her bodily weakness had warned her parents whose only child she was, that they would be unable to find a husband for the young girl, in spite of her property, and they were right; for who would have been foolish enough to take a wife who would never be able to attend to her duties in field or barn? For

this reason they allowed their daughter to learn the trade of a "milliner." Skilful and clever by nature, she soon became so familiar with such work that she was quite a celebrity in her little circle. True, her art consisted wholly in making new caps for the peasant women and their daughters, or washing and ironing the old ones; but she knew how to crimp the edges so daintily, and arrange the stiff little bows so gracefully, that nobody could compare with her. When, in the course of time, her parents died, she took a maid-servant to attend to her house and plot of ground, sold all her cows but one, and put the money into "trade." True, her whole stock of goods consisted merely of a chest full of the cheapest articles, gay neck and pocket handkerchiefs, remnants of calico for caps or aprons, ribbons, thread, needles, shoe-strings, buttons, and similar trifles. But the very cheapness and usefulness of these things secured the shopkeeper a speedy sale. One might have supposed that the out-of-the-way little house which stood on the edge of the moorland like the last offshoot of the inhabited region, would rarely have tempted a buyer, but little Anna did not lack customers. The peasant women and girls were obliged to come to her for their caps, and once there, found it very pleasant to trade with good-humored little Anna, who rarely dismissed a customer without a jest, and was never impatient, no matter how long they considered and reflected.

Besides, what did the country people care for going a few steps out of their way across the moor? All these causes combined to make the little business as active as possible.

During the past year, her gains had been largely increased by taking Margarethe as a pupil. When the child left the village school, Lisette made arrangements for her to go to lame Anna every afternoon, to receive instruction in all the little arts the latter possessed. Perhaps she was induced to take this course in the hope of securing some future means of support to the young girl, perhaps by the compassionate desire not to see Helene's poor child wholly condemned to the rough, coarse toil of a day laborer; at any rate, the plan was a benefit to Margarethe.

Thus it happened that one Saturday afternoon towards the end of Autumn, Margarethe found herself in the cottage of little Anna of Nordhecke, for so the property was called. The landscape without was as cold and cheerless as only November can show; an icy rain, which seemed about to change into snow, rattled against the windows, and the fading twilight still showed the heavy masses of grey clouds shaped into weird forms by the wind, driven in wild confusion across the sky. At this hour the weather displayed all possible bad qualities; it was gloomy, stormy, wet and cold. And besides this, there lay the wide, gloomy, desolate moor; in short, it was terrible out of

doors—woe to the unlucky wight who is not under shelter at such a time!

But how cosy and homelike it was in Anna's little room. The household work and Sunday preparations were almost finished. True, old Mieke was still in the barn milking the cow and giving her some fresh straw; but this was the last of her duties except getting supper, which was rather a pleasure than a task.

The carefully swept floor was sprinkled with fine, white sand; the water was singing in the polished copper kettle on the cooking stove, which diffused a comfortable heat; the tin platters and bright china plates glittered on the shelves on the wall in the double light of the lamp which burned on the table, and a smaller one that stood in the corner before the image of the Madonna—Saturday is specially consecrated to the Holy Virgin.—In another corner was the huge, four-post bedstead with its flowered hangings, and at the head ticked the faithful Black Forest clock, which through many years had unweariedly noted sad as well as joyful hours.

Anna and Margarethe sat at the table opposite each other, each busied in finishing a cap which was to be delivered to its owner on her way to church on the morrow. Both had a piece of knitting work lying beside them, and were rejoicing in the speedy approach of the moment when they could take it up.

Anna did not look like a peasant woman; her dress was so carefully arranged and so perfectly neat, that it almost seemed to raise her a little above her station. She had a somewhat pale, sensible face, large, bright eyes with an unmistakable expression of kindness and gentleness, and the lines of pain which usually disfigure those afflicted with a bodily deformity, were scarcely perceptible in her countenance.

She was the first to finish her cap, which she placed carefully in a bandbox, and then before taking up her knitting work gazed silently and inquiringly at her young companion. But the longer she looked at the poor child's downcast brow, the more troubled her own face became. It is true that during the course of nearly fifty years she had not become familiar with any heavy misfortune, any deep, passionate sorrow, and she had equally failed to know any great happiness or pleasure, but she had had parents whom she had watched and tended, and a home which she loved—for the simple reason that it was her own, and that in it were confined all her little wishes, cares, and labors. This was why her naturally gentle spirit united to her contented mind, and gratitude for what she called her good-fortune and happiness, had preserved her from becoming cold and indifferent to other's griefs.

"Margarethe," she said at last in a low tone. The young girl started, and replied as if to excuse

herself: "The cap will be ready in time; I have almost finished it, Annchen."

"Give it to me; I will soon finish it; we can talk better when it is put away in the bandbox."

Margarethe gave her the work, and took up her knitting. As with a faint sigh she slowly began to unroll it, it seemed as if her thoughts were very far from her occupation.

The second cap soon lay in the bandbox, and Anna also began to set her needles in motion, saying at the same time: "What has happened to you, Gretchen? you don't look well, and you don't talk half as much as usual."

"Nothing has happened, Annchen; I'm not sick, and I haven't lost or broken anything for which mother Ann'Trine can scold me."

"Well, but there are other things to happen; one need not lose or break anything, and something has happened to you, I'll stick to that. It isn't for nothing that you look as pale as the trunks of the birch trees in the avenue, and keep as quiet as a greenfinch in winter."

"Really and truly nothing has happened to *me*; it is somebody else. I don't see how you discovered it, Annchen."

"Somebody else?" asked Anna earnestly. "Who is this somebody, child?"

"I don't think you know him; oh, yes—now I remember—he once came here with me."

"Why, whom are you talking about?"

"I am speaking of Leo—Leo Berger, who used to come to the moor to play with me so often." As she pronounced the name, her eyes filled with tears which she put up her little brown hand to conceal. Anna sat in silence for a few moments, looking anxiously at the weeping girl, for she could not understand what misfortune had befallen Leo. At last she asked: "So something has happened to him? I am sorry; but still, thank God, it isn't as bad as if it had happened to you."

"Oh! yes, yes," stammered Margarethe, deeply agitated, "it is quite as bad."

"But what is it, child, and how does it concern you?"

"Ah! Annchen, I don't think you can understand how it concerns me."

"Why can't I understand it, Gretchen? you know I am not so very stupid. Put your trouble into words, then I will tell you what part of the affair I understand, and what not. What is the matter with Herr Berger?"

"*Herr* Berger?" asked Margarethe, in unmistakable amazement.

"Why yes—is the girl crazy? You just said yourself—"

"I was speaking of Leo, not Herr Berger."

"Good gracious, who is Leo but Herr Berger? If *you* have been foolish enough to keep on calling him Leo as if he were a little boy, everybody else has paid him due respect and spoken of him by his

proper name long ago. But pray tell me at last: what is the matter with him?"

"Ah! Annchen, he has gone to England, and will be obliged to stay there two or three years."

"Is that all?"

"Yes; but I think it is bad enough."

"Well, I must say, I thought you were more sensible, Grete. Does the girl call it a misfortune when people travel in foreign countries for pleasure?"

"But he didn't go for pleasure, Annchen; he did not want to go, and was very sad the last time he came to the moor."

Anna looked Margarethe sharply in the eyes, and then said: "You probably cried, and that made him feel sad; but depend upon it he was very willing to go, or else he would undoubtedly have stayed at home."

"But I know that he went unwillingly. He was obliged to go; his father insisted upon it."

"Ah!—his father insisted. Why so?"

"He was to learn to be a merchant in England," replied Margarethe with a certain pride in the—as she thought—aristocratic calling of her young friend. "There is no place in the whole world where people understand such things as well as in England."

"If that's so, I don't see any reason why he wasn't willing to go there. If he was sensible, he would rejoice that his father was willing to spend the money to send him to England; for I can tell

you there is nothing so extravagantly dear as traveling. Really, I should have thought the young gentleman had a wiser head. I once went to Kevelær, and although I took a quantity of provisions with me, it cost—you won't believe me—the journey in all cost nearly three rix dollars."

"I fully believe it, Annchen. But Leo was not exactly unwilling to go to England, he was only not willing to leave *here*."

"Oh, is that it? that's nothing, it will soon be over. When he has been away a few months, he'll forget all he left behind except his father and brother. They will write to him, but he'll soon forget everybody else."

"Oh! do you think so too?" asked Margarethe, large tears slowly welling into her eyes. "Father Jost says the same thing, but I—I won't believe it. No, I will not and cannot believe that he will forget everything here, even though he should stay away a hundred years."

"So you won't and *can't* believe it?" asked Annchen slowly. "You mean you don't *wish* to; for why shouldn't you be able to believe what others, who are so much wiser and older, tell you?"

"But it is true, Annchen—I cannot. I have tried to put more faith in father Jost's words than my own thoughts, but whenever I do so, something stirs in my heart which makes me feel as if I were suffocating."

"That is very naughty, Grete; it shows how

obstinate you are. If you were wise, you would think of your cap-making and your prayer-book, instead of one who has already forgotten you."

"No indeed, he has not; and even if he had, I would never forget *him*. Did he not beg me not to do so, when he went away?"

"Even if he did, that does not mean much. It is only a way people have when they bid farewell."

"Alas! Anna, I cannot believe you yet—not quite yet. Perhaps I shall do so in time, but then I shall be far more miserable than I am now. Now I can still hope that Leo will come back to talk, jest, and teach me beautiful things once more,—and that some day there will be something brighter for me than this gloomy moor, with father Jost and his brooms, and mother Ann-'Trine, who is always cross."

"Well, I am here too," said Anna, evidently wounded.

"Yes, you are here too, and it is a real blessing to me. Leo told me I must stay with Anna of Nordhecke as much as I could; he didn't think you would talk so about him."

"Well, well," replied Anna, instantly appeased; "what harm have I said? Only I know the world better than either of you; but we'll say no more about it now. Here comes Mieke with the milk; she can bake the pan cakes, while you make the coffee, and when we have had our supper, we will say the litany before the Virgin, and then go to bed."

CHAPTER VII.

MARGARETHE FINDS AN UNCLE.

MARGARETHE usually spent Saturday night at Anna's little house, and did not return to Jost's cottage until the following day after the service at church, which she attended with the little milliner.

To-day as usual, she parted with Anna after High Mass, and turned towards home with Jost.

They walked silently along a narrow path through the brown heather which had been soaked by the rain of the previous night, and across the dead garlands of moss, which in many places lay across the way. Jost was thinking now of the sermon, now of the bad beer the inn-keeper sold this year, and also trying to search out the places where the best heather for broom-making was to be found. Engrossed by all these thoughts in turn, he paid little attention to Margarethe, especially as they were obliged to walk along the narrow path in single file, and the young girl lingered a little distance behind, equally absorbed in her own reflections, which were by no means so calm



JUSIZTRATH GREVEN.

as the old man's. Since Leo's departure, the eyes of her mind had been opened, and she perceived the mournful poetry of the utter desolation and cheerlessness of her home. Hitherto she had always had a quick perception of all the bright spots, the few attractions granted to this dreary bit of earth, and did not notice the dark side ; but since the desolate home had also become a solitary one, since her friend, and with him all the pleasures he had given her, were taken away for so long a time, alas ! perhaps forever, the whole region had assumed a mournful aspect. She gazed sadly at the grey clouds floating slowly over the cold sky, and listened to the croaking of a flock of crows, which, flapping their wings heavily, were struggling to reach the tops of some trees that appeared in the distant horizon, or to the murmur of a little dark brook that wound through the reeds and rushes at her side. Her mood, her feelings, were entirely in harmony with the aspect of her surroundings.

When Jost reached the spot where the path crossed the highway, he paused and turned to look for Margarethe. She hastened forward, and both were about to walk on along the broad road, when they heard in the distance loud shouts, and the rattling of a carriage, and a handsome coach, which they had not observed, drove rapidly up and stopped near them.

"I should like to know what that means," muttered Jost. But there was a still greater source

of amazement in store ; for the coachman accosted him with : " Halloa ! friend, do you know where Jost Biesenbusch, the broom-maker, lives ? "

" Well," replied Jost with the queer smile, half humorous, half crafty, which the peasants call *Glimmlachen*, " I think I ought to know. "

" Well, deuce take it, why don't you tell me then ? "

" Did you ask me ? " answered Jost, assuming an air of great simplicity.

The coachman played with his whip as if he would have liked to try it on some other back than those of his horses, when the window was suddenly let down, and an old gentleman's face appeared.

" What are you chattering about again ? " he asked impatiently.

" Why, sir, I told you this morning I didn't know the house, and you know no more about it than I do, so I must ask the people to find out. "

" But you ask people in such a way that they have no inclination to answer you. My good friend," he continued, turning to Jost, " perhaps you know where Jost Biesenbusch, the broom-maker, lives ? "

Jost, with the same queer smile which induced the old gentleman to look at him more closely, replied : " To be sure I know, sir ; I have already told your coachman so. "

" Then perhaps you will be good enough to show us the way there, or if you have not time, give us directions for finding it. "

"I'll go with you," said Jost, "for I must go there myself."

"You are going there too?"

"Yes, of course I am. Does that astonish you? It's my own house."

"Your own house?"

"Yes, why shouldn't it be?" asked Jost, now perplexed in his turn. "Does that seem very surprising? Why shouldn't it be my house?"

The old gentleman leaned forward again; his eyes rested with eager, almost anxious suspense on Margarethe's face, and he hastily interrupted Jost with the question: "And does this young girl belong to you?"

"Well, you're a queer gentleman enough," said Jost, shaking his grey head peevishly. "First you won't believe that my house is my house, and now you think Grete don't belong to me."

"Grete?" asked the stranger, and repeated in an under tone: "Margarethe." Then turning to Jost he again asked: "Is she your child?"

"What does it concern strangers who stop one in the middle of the highway, whether she is my child, or a relation, or who she is?" answered Jost rudely. "When people go to church in this Winter weather, they like to get home soon and eat their honestly earned Sunday cabbage and bit of bacon." So saying, he passed his horny hand over his lips as if the thought of the cabbage made his mouth water.

The stranger, in a grave, earnest tone, replied: "Don't be so hasty, my good friend. If this young girl is the Margarethe who was placed in your charge by Lisette Wegmann, the matter concerns me very closely, for I am her uncle. I have come here to take her away with me."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Jost in a dull, hollow tone. He was so terrified that he was obliged to lean on his cane for support; his knees trembled, and he stared at the stranger with mouth and eyes wide open.

Margarethe, too, who from the first moment had felt an eager interest in the stranger, probably because his refined voice and language reminded her of her absent friend, also uttered a low exclamation of mingled surprise and terror, and involuntarily seized her foster-father's arm.

Despite the coachman's imprecations on the delay, the stranger left the carriage, approached Margarethe, held out his hand to her, and said gently: "Won't you come to me, my child?"

Margarethe hesitated a moment, and gazed at him timidly; but his whole appearance inspired such a feeling of confidence, that the next moment she placed her hand in his, and gazed up into his face with an expression of quiet expectation.

"What is your name, my child?" he asked in the same gentle tone.

"Margarethe Helene Wegmann," she replied,

probably understanding the importance of the question; "kind Jost is my foster father."

"It is she, it must be," exclaimed the stranger, now greatly agitated. "I beg you, my good man, tell me the truth; is she really the child whom Lisette Wegmann entrusted to your care fourteen years ago?"

Jost still stood as if utterly bewildered. He was so accustomed to Margarethe's presence and his intercourse with her, which was as frequent and affectionate as it can only be between father and daughter, and in his rough way loved the young girl so dearly, that the thought of a separation had never occurred to him. Thus when the idea of such a parting came suddenly upon him, the thought was so painful that he knew not how to make his love of truth coincide with his wishes in his reply to the question addressed to him.

He was silent for a short time, during which he pushed his old blue cap from side to side in great confusion, then evasively replied: "I always thought she was to stay with me as long as I lived. Jost Biesenbusch would always have had a bit of bread for her, even if the board money hadn't been paid; and when they at last took me to the 'sexton's camp,' I thought she would go to little Anna of Nordhecke. There she would have been well off until she could perhaps take the shop, and then she would have been safe at all events."

"You are an honest fellow, Jost, and meant to

do well," replied the stranger. "I do not doubt that Margarethe is as dear to you as if she were your own child—see, she is giving the best proof of it," he continued, deeply touched, as he motioned towards Margarethe, who, in her timid confusion, was pressing close to the side of the faithful old man: "but on that very account, you will not desire to stand in the way of the child's happiness."

"God forbid," replied Jost earnestly. "But who is to assure me that you will make her happy, sir?"

"That is a thought which I honor; but this is not a suitable place to discuss the matter any further; we will drive on to your house. Let Margarethe come inside with me, and do you sit on the box to direct the coachman."

The traveler's proposal was accepted. Jost climbed up to the box with a heavy heart, and sat down so stiffly and awkwardly that the impatient coachman grew still more ill-tempered; but the old man's thoughts were too earnestly fixed upon Margarethe for him to be disturbed about the man's grumbling. Still, when the carriage was again in motion, and he found himself approaching his home with such unusual comfort, he could not help recalling with pleasure the day when he had spent his money to drive in a coach with Margarethe, and fancied what Ann'Trine would say when he again rode up to the door in such an aristocratic style, without any expense.

The thought lured to his face the characteristic smile that we have several times noticed, and he rubbed his hard hands joyously, though he did not succeed in attaining a truly happy frame of mind, because the memory of his impending loss oppressed his heart.

Meantime Margarethe, flushing and paling by turns, sat in great confusion beside her new-found relative. Often, when other children had been talking of their parents and grandparents, their brothers, sisters, and other relatives, the wish had arisen in her heart that she too might utter these dear names, and have such pleasant ties; and as she grew older and obtained a vague idea of the nature of her situation, this desire became more eager and painful. Yet now, when she was perhaps to see it soon fulfilled, how gladly she would have recalled it if she could thereby have secured her former miserable home, and saved herself from entering a new and wholly unknown world.

Her kindly old companion watched her for a short time in silence, then to open the conversation, asked: "How old are you, my child?"

"Between fifteen and sixteen," replied Margarethe timidly.

"Have you always lived with old Jost?"

"Ever since I was a year old, they tell me."

"Have you ever seen your father or mother?"

"No, never."

"Nor heard anything about them?"

“Very little.”

“Who told you about them, my child?”

“Nobody told me about them; but when I went to school the other children said I did not belong to them, I was a foundling. I asked Jost what that was, and he explained it to me, but said I was not one; for my parents did not leave me at a church door, or on a street corner, but that I had lost my father before my birth, and my mother when I was scarcely a year old. Since that time an old lady, one of my mother’s relatives, has paid for my board every year.”

“He told you the truth, and I cannot say anything more about your parents at present. When you are a few years older you shall know the rest; but *this* I can tell you now, that the old lady who provided for you after your mother’s death, was your grandmother; I am her brother.”

“Then sir,” said Margarethe timidly, “you are my great uncle.”

“Yes,” replied the old gentleman smiling; “but why does that frighten you?”

“It doesn’t frighten me; but I wondered—”

“What did you wonder? be perfectly frank with me, child; it is necessary if we are to learn to understand each other. So you wondered—”

“Why you came here to see me; and especially why you should trouble yourself about me, when I am only a disgrace to you.”

“You a disgrace to me? What put such an

idea into your head? Who told you anything of that sort?"

"Mother Ann'-Trine, Jost's wife, was angry with me a little while ago, because in grieving over Leo's absence, I forgot to take some roots to the cow. She scolded me bitterly, and said it was lucky Leo had gone or I should have become just as bad as my mother. Then I grew angry and said my mother was not bad, she was very good; but Ann'-Trine screamed so loud that Jost heard it out of doors: 'Your mother was a disgrace to her whole family, and you are one too.' Then when Jost came in he said it was unfortunately true, but he scolded Ann'-Trine for telling me, said it was much too soon for me to know about such things, and commanded me to ask no more about it, and never speak of it to any human being. I have not done so until now; but I have thought of it a great deal, with sorrow and anxiety. Dear sir, do pray tell me what harm I and my poor, dead mother have done."

"You have done nothing wrong, my poor child, it is only your unfortunate mother who once committed a fatal error. You certainly know, or can understand that the sins of the parents dishonor the children too. But since your poor mother died of grief and remorse for her one false step, and we certainly may be permitted to hope that God has forgiven her for it, we ought not to judge her otherwise than gently. I see you do, my child;

if your mother were still alive you surely would not increase her grief by reproaches, but strive to soften it by your love and devotion. Who is this Leo, of whom you spoke?"

Margarethe explained, and the old man listened with eager attention. Two things were made clear to him by her story;—the cause of the refinement, which, to his great astonishment, he had perceived in the poor child's manner, and been unable to reconcile with her rude surroundings, and the existence of a deep affection for her young teacher, the true nature of which she did not appear as yet to understand.

"You are greatly indebted to young Herr Berger," he said earnestly; "for if hitherto you had had no better instruction and society than the village schools and the home of your poor foster parents could have afforded, it would be very difficult for us to supply the deficiencies. By the efforts of this excellent young man, you are far better informed than I dared to hope, and in a very short time we shall succeed in fitting you to fill the position of my niece and foster daughter."

"Am I really to be your niece, your daughter!" exclaimed Margarethe in a tone of mingled joy and dread. "Ah! sir, dear, kind sir!"

"If you wish to be my little daughter," said the old man smiling, and forcing back a secret tear, you must not call me 'sir;' say uncle, as your poor mother did."

“Uncle? Ah! yes; my dear uncle. And you will really take me with you, and always be as kind and gentle as you are to-day? But is the place where I am to live with you near our moor?”

“Not very near, Margarethe; we must ride two days to reach it.”

Margarethe was silent. To her, who had scarcely ever been an hour's walk beyond the borders of the moor, the distance seemed so great that she feared it would separate her forever from all she had loved. The more the thought of parting from her former life absorbed her mind, the more sorrowful she became, until her uncle at last noticed that she was weeping softly, but very bitterly.

“Why, Margarethe, child, is it so very terrible to be obliged to ride a few days? or are you unwilling to go with me? Believe me, you shall be as happy as if I were your own father.”

“Oh, I know that; for only one person ever spoke to me as you do, dear sir—dear uncle—I will gladly go with you; but poor old Jost, and Annchen of Nordhecke, and—and—”

“Dear child! I suppose the parting from these good people will grieve you to the heart; it is very natural, and I should be sorry if you could leave them without regret; but don't be so sad. Jost shall often visit us, and we will not forget the moor. You may come to see your friends sometimes, and we will show the good people a kindness whenever we can.”

Margarethe was too gentle and submissive not to pay attention to the words of her new guardian, and by the time she reached her humble home, succeeded in becoming tolerably composed. But when she saw the face of her rough old foster mother, who was staring in amazement at the unusual sight of a coach stopping before her door, and looked up to her little chamber windows, behind whose bright panes a scarlet geranium, Leo's gift, was blooming, her eyes again filled with tears. We love our homes be they ever so poor, ever so miserable! What a powerful, enduring charm clings to the place which sheltered our early years. Ah! this is one of the most benevolent dispensations of Providence; for the majority of mankind have humble homes.

Justizrath Greven of course looked at Jost's miserable cottage with very different eyes. Deep compassion for the child who had been condemned to live here in penury and want, while her grandparents were rolling in wealth, mingled with angry grief at the thought of his brother-in-law's stern pride, and his sister's cowardly fear, through which she had sinned against her grand-daughter. For a moment he was so deeply agitated that he could scarcely answer Jost, who had opened the carriage door and invited him to descend and come into the house, but when he saw Margarethe's eyes fixed anxiously upon him, he composed himself, and strove to soothe his excited feelings by the

solemn resolution to use every effort to make amends to the poor orphan for what she had lost through the neglect of others.

His conversation with Jost and old Ann'-Trine was a long one, but ended satisfactorily to both. The faithful old couple, with the keen insight peculiar to their class, soon became convinced that Margarethe would be "hugely well off" with her new guardian, and Greven perceived by the unfeigned sorrow with which they spoke of their impending separation from the young girl, a sorrow for which the promise of an abundant support for the future afforded no consolation, that, in their rude way, they had sincerely loved the forsaken child. The hardest task was with Margarethe herself. She parted from the old people with the bitterest grief, which could scarcely have been greater if they had been her own parents, took leave of the wretched little garden, the dog, the cat, and even the lean old cow, with floods of tears; but the most agonizing farewell was taken of her own little room, where she had so often prayed for Leo before the picture of the Virgin,—Leo's gift,—so often read the books he brought her. This had been the scene of her deepest, most quiet joys, and it seemed to her as if in abandoning this secret asylum for her dearest memories and wishes, the chasm between her and her absent friend grew infinitely wider.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNWELCOME GUEST.

ABOUT the same time that Margarethe left Jost's cottage, old Count Ulrich von Steinthal, the father of the man who had destroyed the honor and life of the young girl's mother, died at his castle. Ruinous to poor Helene as the dead man's influence over his son had been, his death was a matter of total indifference to her daughter, who had no suspicion of this grandfather's existence.

The old count had just as little knowledge of her; he had obtained his object in regard to Margarethe and her mother;—they did not bear his name,—and as soon as he was secure of this fact he forgot the very existence of such inferior creatures. If they had asked for money, he would have advised his son to give them a generous supply; but as the “official's daughter,” who was rich herself, asked nothing, not the faintest idea that his son could have any duty to discharge towards her or her child, had ever entered his brain.

As he had been at ease in his own mind on this

point, so it was with regard to all others. By his son's wealthy marriage he had not only obtained an old age free from care, but had seen the house of Steinthal restored to a large portion of the magnificence which was its due, and the future of his race apparently secured. His son had already four children; two sturdy sons and two daughters, the latter older than their brothers. One sister was beautiful as day, but the other was plain like her mother, so it was to be hoped that the elder would make a brilliant marriage, whereby the younger with an abundant private income, might live with her. Thanks to the care of their mother and grandfather, the children had been trained in the forms and customs of their rank; all four were healthy, bright, and teeming with family pride.

Count Ulrich could bear witness that he had labored zealously to bring about the results he so earnestly desired, and that, but for his active influence upon his son's life and family relations, this object would never have been attained; he thereby believed he had won the right to look back with a calm conscience, nay, even with a certain sense of satisfaction, over the whole of his past life. Not the faintest idea ever entered his mind that a man of his rank had any other duties than to carefully provide for the splendor and welfare of his family, and secure its permanent continuance upon the usual foundations of wealth and aristocratic alliances. With a cold nature and a narrow, inactive

mind, although not without a certain cunning in little things, he had always anxiously endeavored to keep aloof from all other classes of society, and thus made it impossible to receive other ideas and fresher thoughts than the traditions of his rank, since his knowledge was so deficient he could scarcely form an impartial judgment.

From this state of affairs it may be easily understood that the activity limited to such narrow bounds, had been neither benevolent nor ennobling. The count had afforded no one pleasure, awakened no gratitude; he had neither given nor received love, and yet he laid himself down to his last repose entirely at peace with himself. It might be said to cheer one in regard to the future destiny of such a man, that he had acted in good faith and knew no better; but there is always an agonizing uncertainty. The lessons of christianity and philanthropy penetrate into all circles, and he who does not heed them must wilfully reject them.

But, little happiness as Count Ulrich's deeds might have produced, and inferior as were his intellectual powers, his influence, so far as it extended, was by no means inconsiderable. He had completely governed his son, partly by his parental authority, and partly by the indifference and calmness, which, supported by external circumstances he invariably opposed to the latter's passionate acts and feelings; but in spite of this, they could not live together without serious disputes.

The young man, in his ill-regulated, passionate moods, often inclined towards the life his father rejected as useless and troublesome, and besides this his early years having fallen in the time of the war for freedom, he had occasionally caught a ray of the golden light which then flooded the whole nation like a sun of peace and joy. Whenever a spark of this borrowed fire appeared in the words or acts of the young man, his father was instantly anxious to extinguish it. He called every such expression a breath from the sulphurous pool of revolution and indiscriminately condemned every idea which turned towards progress, and the victory always remained with him, because the principles of the so-called free-thinkers had not taken sufficiently deep root in his son's soul for him to be willing to make any sacrifice for them. They perhaps only served as a pretext to aid him in gratifying some ill-regulated caprice or illicit wish.

In this respect his father really had the advantage; he clung unchangeably to his stiff old ideas, and had the courage and frankness always to acknowledge and act up to them under all circumstances.

The old count had always lived on friendly terms with his daughter-in-law. She sympathized with his plans and views in regard to their family life, and the education of the children. The form into which she moulded her household matters was

cold and unpleasing, but never deviated a hair's breadth from the rules assigned by aristocratic propriety. The manner in which she arranged her domestic affairs and wore her rich clothing, the entertainments given to different members of the family, as well as to the social circle, which at rare intervals, she gathered round her,—all partook in some degree of her own unlovely character, and were as tiresome as herself; yet one could not deny that this life, although it neither brightened nor beautified the spacious halls through which it moved, was well fitted to the magnificent frame that surrounded it. But this was all that Count Ulrich desired of his daughter-in-law in this respect. He did not mind their little differences in taste, at least so he persuaded himself with wise magnanimity; but at heart it was the consciousness that the countess probably felt how much importance her wealth bestowed upon her in this ruined family, and would not resign her right to rule without a violent struggle, which induced him to be so yielding. The young count, from the first moment he gave his hand to his unloved cousin, had taken up his share of their life with a sort of despair, and striven for little else than to make the tedium of an aimless existence as endurable as possible by the manifold distractions of frequent change of scene. His father, who knew the dark spot in his past, and his wife who was aware of the weakness of his affection, but did not

wish to utterly destroy it, never interfered with his course of life. If, however, on any occasion, a slight dispute arose between the husband and wife, the old count was always on his daughter-in-law's side, partly because he thought it more prudent, and also because in most cases their views harmonized. The old gentleman, in his quiet way, had been a support and help to her, had showed his affection for his grandchildren so far as lay in his nature, and cared for their health and proper training.

His son had had many a contest with him, but the father always remained the victor. It was not to be denied that to his counsel, his firmly expressed will, this son was indebted for his worldly prosperity, and his lofty, undisputed position among his equals in rank; but this very counsel, this almost forcibly executed will, had cost the young man the happiness of his whole life, and driven him to commit the great sin of which he had been guilty. Although he was careless and selfish enough to partly shut out the memory of his perjury and its fatal consequences,—he never attained complete forgetfulness, calmness untortured by remorse; the wounds in his conscience always separated him from his father and the world.

Thus, in his father's death, the young count really lost the weakest of all his family ties; yet he mourned for the old man now that he was gone. He had been his father, and his loss—so it seemed

to him—would make a great void in his life. When he saw his children weep for their grandfather, a flood of bitter tears gushed from his own eyes; but the thought of seeking comfort where a husband in better, more natural circumstances, would have been sure to find it,—in the heart of his wife,—never occurred to him. Still, in spite of this, he was not utterly deserted in the house whose head he had now become; he had one sympathizing, loving consoler.

* * * * *

The November day was drawing to a close. It was the first frost of the new Winter, and the clearness of the air delayed the approach of evening a little longer than is usual at this season of the year. Count Carl and his family were not in their usual sitting room. The near relatives of the old count and the noble families in the neighborhood had come to Castle Miltenberg to attend the funeral, but most of them took leave directly after dinner, and only a nephew of the dead man, Baron von Dornick, his wife, and sixteen year old daughter remained. They were all assembled in a spacious apartment that looked out upon the lake. In the central window stood a table, around which the count's four children and their cousin were gathered, while the middle of the lofty room was occupied by a larger table, near which sat the count and countess, with the baron and his wife.

The children, in spite of their gloomy mourning dresses, were talking together quite gayly. Although the solemn ceremony they had witnessed in the morning had made a strong and painful impression upon them, and they sincerely mourned their grandfather's death, their young hearts were not so deeply moved as to leave them no power to be interested in another and more cheerful event; and such they considered the presence of guests in the castle, especially that of their young cousin, whom all were eagerly striving to entertain.

"You must come to us in the Summer, Cecilia," cried Fritz, the younger boy, "then I'll lend you my pony, and you can ride to the village—or even as far as S——"

"Oh! that's nothing," said the elder brother; "I know of something much better. I will take you out fishing, or row you in the boat; that will be far pleasanter."

"You are both very stupid," angrily interposed Therese, the count's youngest daughter, who seemed to have inherited her mother's personal appearance with her name. "You propose nothing but boys' amusements for poor Cecilia; but she would enjoy it much more to drive to the city with mamma and me, go into the beautiful shops, and hear the band on the Parade."

"How precocious!" thought Cecilia, a tall, handsome girl, with a bright, but somewhat prematurely old face—the reproach she was secretly

casting upon her cousin was perhaps a little deserved by herself—then said aloud: “But isn’t Louise to drive with us, Therese?”

“Oh! she would much rather go to walk with papa,” replied the younger sister, pertly: “mamma says Louise is insufferably staid.”

“Is that true, little Loulou?” asked Cecilia.

“Mamma only says that in joke,” cried Ulrich, eager to defend his favorite sister; “she loves Loulou very much, just as much as she does you, Theresettchen.”

The little girl pouted her somewhat prominent lips contemptuously, and Cecilia continued: “So you have nothing to say to me, Louise; I almost think you wouldn’t be glad to see me if I should come back in the Summer.”

“Oh! yes indeed, Cecilia,” was the courteous, although not very cordial reply; “but I am afraid the things I should propose might not suit you.”

“What would you do to entertain me, then?”

“I thought it would be very pleasant to draw, practice our music, read—”

“No, no,” interrupted Cecilia, laughing; “I never do such things when I am visiting. Fraulein Disson torments me enough at home. But you have a governess too, Louise; I should think her eyes would be too sharp for you to find your ‘Paradise’ in the study hours.”

“I didn’t say that,” replied Louise, a smile flitting over her remarkably beautiful, but some-

what pale face, which expressed a deeper thoughtfulness than seemed to be quite in harmony with her years. "I should prefer to have my seventeenth birthday as near as yours, so that I need not read, draw, and practice my music according to Fraulein Falk's ideas. When she raises her eye-brows and says: 'Louise, I have a charming book; we will read it together'—it almost spoils the contents for me. But if I am allowed to take one myself and run away with it into some window corner, or under a tree, I am perfectly happy."

"I am sorry, but I don't share your tastes at all, Loulou. I should much rather drive to the city with Therese, or row on the lake with Ulrich. I have never learned to ride, Fritz, and don't know whether I could."

The boys now eagerly joined in the conversation, and the merry, prattling, childish group afforded a very pleasant picture, on which the count's eyes rested with such a kindly expression, that the Baroness von Dornick said smiling: "It is a pity, *mon cousin*, that our Cecilia is too old for Ulrich; one would think you would not be unfavorably disposed towards a future alliance between the two children."

The countess, although she did not consider herself a day too old for her husband, would have indignantly rejected the thought of giving her son a wife who was his senior. She therefore, before her husband could answer, replied: "I am afraid,

my dear, our Ulrich would be far too wild for your sensible Cecilia."

"Yes, Cecilia really is a very clever girl," said the baroness, with maternal pride.

"Then she would just suit Ulrich," replied the count, with no other design than to tease his wife a little. "We see how brilliantly my wife's cleverness shines forth when contrasted with me."

The countess had a sharp answer to her husband's jeering speech upon her lips; but the baroness, who liked nothing so much as quiet and comfort, and therefore always strove to avert an impending storm, hastily replied: "Modesty compels me to remark that there is a wide difference between Cecilia's cleverness and that of our dear Therese. The child has neither special taste, nor great talent for the learning with which people fill young ladies' heads now-a-days; she is only practical."

"Well, in that she is like her mother," said the baron good-naturedly. "I have always been the better for my wife's talent for practical matters, and I think it will be no bad thing for my daughter's future husband."

"So much the more," observed the countess in her dry manner, "as Cecilia must have an overpoweringly practical mind, since she inherits it from both parents."

"Ah! you mean I too have a practical turn," said the baron, bowing. "Well, you are quite

right: I am practical, purely practical. It must be so to harmonize with my views of life."

"Yes, he is right: neither he nor his wife have any other qualities," thought the count. "To think that such people should be Therese's favorite companions! They are fairly dried up with their lack of imagination, of warmth of heart, and of all need of anything higher."

As he glanced contemptuously at a very useful but by no means ornamental piece of netting in the baroness' hand, his thoughts became absorbed in recollections of a visit he had paid to this Baroness von Dornick soon after his marriage with the countess. At that time the baroness had been wedded scarcely a year, and was a handsome young girl, merry and blooming like her husband, who was then a captain of cavalry, stationed in a gay, provincial capital. Here the wealthy young couple went to housekeeping, and as a matter of course were much sought after and admired; for youth, beauty, wealth, and lavish hospitality, soon obtain a large circle of so-called friends. The baron's household arrangements were in perfect harmony with the gay, social life he led. Every guest praised the bright, spacious rooms, elegant, comfortable furniture, handsome paintings, charming flower garden, dainty table, good wine, and attentive, well-trained servants in the Dornick household. Even a fine piano was not wanting, although neither the baron nor his wife played; but when

on the second day of his visit, Herr von Dornick being at riding-school, and the ladies dressing for their morning visits, the time hung heavy on the count's hands, and he sought for a book to while away an hour, he searched in vain among the thousand ornaments and trifles that covered the buffets, tables, and etageres—he found everything else. When the baroness entered in full dress, the count could not help asking: “Where is your library, cousin?”

“My library?” she replied, with a look of the greatest astonishment.

“Yes, your books; I have been looking everywhere, but found none.”

“My prayer-books are lying on the bureau in my dressing-room; but what do you want of one on a week-day, cousin?”

“Why, I did not ask for a manual of devotion; I expected to find a novel, a book of travels, or something of the kind.”

“Oh! I haven't anything of that sort; yet stop—I believe there were some among my school books, but I left them all at home for my younger sisters.”

“But Friedrich must have books; I should like something to read until he returns from riding-school, and you and Therese come back from your visits.”

“My husband?” asked the fair young wife, looking very charming with the slight shade of thought

on her blooming face. "Perhaps he has, and if so, they must be in his room; we will see."

She accompanied the count to her husband's room, while half amused, half astonished, he asked: "Do you never see Friedrich read, cousin?"

"Do I ever see him read? No indeed; I couldn't stand that, it is so stupid."

They found in the captain's room everything that one could think necessary for the comfort of a fashionable young man, but no books. Yes—there was something to read; on the table before the sofa lay a few numbers of a military newspaper, and on another, half hidden under a pile of other things, a book. The count read the title: "Complete and easily understood directions for the training of blood horses," and instantly laid the treasure aside.

The baroness looked at him in surprise, and said: "Why, we have found more than we expected; a book and some newspapers besides."

"But I have lost my desire to read," replied the count, smiling; "I will go to the club for an hour instead."

"That is a better plan, dear cousin; it will be much more amusing," replied the baroness, looking earnestly at the book and newspapers as if they were very unfamiliar objects, and added: "I only wonder how Friedrich can meddle with such things, he is generally so practical."

This incident recurred to the count's mind as

vividly as if it had happened that very day, and in strange contrast arose the memory of the taste poor Helene had cherished for art and literature, even for more serious studies, and this to a far higher degree than is customary among ladies. He thought of the careful education she had enjoyed, of her talent for conducting an animated, cheerful conversation, of her deep, warm affections, and a feeling rose within him that her early death had been a loss to him, that he had not been the cause of it, and had her life been prolonged, spite of the wall of separation which had risen between them, it would have been a gain to him. This feeling, unauthorized as it was, inspired him with a deep repugnance towards his present surroundings, and to escape for a short time the conversation of his practical relatives, he rose and approached the children.

"Papa," said Louise looking up at him affectionately, with a loving gaze which betrayed a far more tender heart than was usually expressed by her cold, impassive features, "Papa, are you coming to join us? That is splendid, I have a favor to ask which you surely won't refuse me."

"And what is the favor, my child?" he inquired, glad to divert his thoughts by a conversation with his daughter; as he spoke he passed his hand caressingly over her shining golden tresses, for Louise was a blonde, though her parents, brothers, and sister all had dark hair.

“You know, papa,” replied the young girl, “I sent poor, lame Dick Jansen to the village tailor to learn his trade. But what I saved from my pocket money was never quite enough to pay the apprentice’s fee, and grandpapa sometimes helped me. The quarterly bill will be due day after to-morrow, and you know our dear grandpapa—”

Louise said no more, but looked at her father with a pleading gaze—oh! what memories that glance recalled! Why must these torturing recollections, which after so many long and weary struggles he had at last crushed down, return to him to-day? And how strange it seemed that Therese’s child should bear so close a resemblance to that poor, dead girl! While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he assured his daughter, with a sad smile, that her wishes should be gratified. Just at that moment the door of the apartment was noiselessly opened, and a servant, approaching the count with evident reluctance, said in a low tone that a stranger who had begged to see him, was waiting in the small reception room.

The servant’s fears proved well founded; for the count started up and reproached him violently for not having sent away the intrusive stranger, as he knew the family received no one but relatives and intimate friends in these days of mourning.

“I could not send the strange gentleman away,” said the man apologetically—he was an old servant who had always been attached to his master’s

person, and knew all the events of his life,—“I could not send him away; he compelled me to announce him, and here is his card.”

The count cast a glance at the bit of paste-board, and turned deadly pale. Twice he strove to speak, but without being able to utter a sound; at last, with his eyes still fixed upon the card, he drew a long breath and said: “I will come at once,” and the servant disappeared. But the count’s whole manner had undergone such a change, that Louise caught his hand and asked anxiously: “Papa, are you well?”

“Perfectly well, my child; but I must go and speak to this gentleman,” he answered, with an anxious hesitation in his tone, as if the resolution had cost a hard struggle.

He lingered a few minutes longer, and then slowly left the room like an invalid, or as a man striving to bear a burden beyond his strength.

He paused a moment in the lighted corridor, and again read, half under his breath, the fatal card: “Lorsberg, Regierungsrath Lorsberg—Helene—Helene Lorsberg,” he added after a short pause, in a frightened whisper. This was the reason his nerves were so fearfully shaken, that reality should tread so closely upon the thoughts which had crowded so irresistably upon his mind that day. He still lingered. How gladly he would have avoided this meeting! He half formed the resolution to send word by a servant to the regierungs-

rath that he could not receive him, at least not now, and beg him, if an interview was necessary, to appoint another day. He was in the very act of giving the message when he changed his mind. What would delay avail? Was it not better to learn at once the cause of this unwelcome visit? Might he not perhaps have come on behalf of poor Helene's child? She must now be almost grown up. Perhaps the grandfather came to claim a dowry for her. Yes, that was very possible. If so, he should not have come in vain, the count would show himself generous.

Improbable as was this supposition in regard to a man of the regierungsrath's unbending pride and great wealth, especially as not the slightest claim had been made during all these years, the count clung to it; he felt the necessity of encouraging himself. At last he opened the door of the drawing-room, and went to meet his visitor.

CHAPTER IX.

OUTRAGED HONOR.

A FEW wax candles which had been hastily lighted, cast a partial glow through the apartment; but as the regierungsrath stood directly before the table on which they were burning, they shed their full light upon him, and the count instantly noticed how stern and gloomy was the expression of his face. This was no guest who came to express some indifferent wish, but an enemy, a furious, determined enemy, and the count felt the cold perspiration standing on his brow, while his heart seemed almost to stop beating.

The regierungsrath looked up without the slightest apparent emotion; not even the faintest gesture of recognition softened the wrath expressed in his countenance, but he stood motionless and stern with his eyes fixed steadily upon the count, and this very composure contained a more terrible menace than could have been conveyed by the most passionate words. He could not endure it, and therefore broke the silence by faltering: "You

wished to speak to me, Herr Regierungsrath?"

"Yes;" was the curt, angry response, followed by the same oppressive silence. The count interrupted it a second time to offer his guest a chair, which Lorsberg accepted without uttering a word or removing his eyes from the master of the house. The latter was striving to find some means to break a silence which was becoming more torturing each moment, when the regierungsrath at last began to speak himself. "My wife died a week ago," he said, in a cold, stern voice. Count von Steinthal, who was secretly wondering why he gave him this information, attempted to express his sympathy, but Lorsberg, without heeding his words, continued in the same tone: "She was buried on the evening of the 19th, and early the following morning I set out on my journey to Miltenberg."

The count's astonishment increased, but he carefully avoided any expression of it, and replied, bowing: "It is very flattering to me, Herr Regierungsrath, that in your heavy affliction you should seek the consolations of friendship at Miltenberg."

"You are mistaken," said Lorsberg, "I did not come here to meet a friend; I have friends no longer, for I am a dishonored man. When did they ever cling to one disgraced?—But I know of an *enemy* at Miltenberg, and came to stand face to face with *him*."

He laid so strong an emphasis on the word *enemy* that it pierced the count's very soul; it was

the first sign of emotion betrayed in the voice of the regierungsrath, and it was plainly a hostile one.

As his opponent remained in an embarrassed silence, Lorsberg continued: "You now know the object of my visit, and will see for yourself that I do not come here to seek comfort like a woman, but to avenge myself as beseems a man."

Count von Steinthal shrank back, but Lorsberg quietly continued: "Yes, though guiltless and hitherto ignorant of it, I come as a dishonored, most shamefully dishonored man, whose vengeance will be deadly in proportion to the shame heaped upon his head."

"You are mistaken, Herr Regierungsrath," stammered the count, who had lost all self-command, "you are certainly mistaken; what enemy could you have at Miltenberg, when I—"

"You!" interrupted Lorsberg with a sneering laugh. "You would probably do me the honor to call yourself my friend, with the same honest intentions, the same pure designs that you had seventeen years ago. But it is useless. My wife and daughter are no longer alive to be deceived; my eyes are at last opened, and my grand-daughters are still too young to fill Helene's place."

"Oh! Herr Regierungsrath, you are punishing me too cruelly," cried the count, with an imploring glance.

"Punishing? Do you call it a punishment, when I merely allude to facts? What exquisite tender-

ness of feeling you must possess when simply recurring to the past is felt as a punishment."

"Herr Regierungsrath," replied the count, who had regained a tolerable degree of composure, "if any other man whom I honored less highly, had permitted himself to use such expressions towards me—rely upon it—I should not listen to them so quietly."

"Whom you honored less than myself? That is not your first lie."

"Sir!"

"Ah! is the noble blood beginning to stir? No, I repeat it, it is not your first, or your worst lie. Or did you show your esteem for the father, when you dragged his daughter into the mire? Is not your cowardly hypocrisy to-day far better than the treachery with which you ensnared my once innocent child?"

"Sir, I must beg you to be more cautious in your expressions," cried the count, who saw no other means of escape than to work himself up into a pretended fury; "I don't know what can induce you to recall a long forgotten story with such unexampled shamelessness. If you intended to extort—" he rose with a repellant expression upon his aristocratic face, as if he considered it entirely beneath his dignity to continue the conversation another moment.

He had no opportunity to say more, but it was equally impossible for him to leave his unwelcome

guest. Lorsberg seized him firmly by the shoulder and forced him back into his chair as if he would crush him. He was silent for a moment, but the fury in his eyes exerted such a powerful influence over the man before him, that after a vain effort to regain his composure, he helplessly averted his gaze without uttering a word.

“Do not venture to leave this room, or to address words to me which, between us, could have no meaning except in connection with yourself. Extort? Why should I, a rich man, who have lived in luxury from my youth, seek to extort anything from a beggarly count, who, to save himself from his creditors, was compelled to sell himself, body and soul, to an ugly old woman? And shameless? Which is shameless? The father who stands here to revenge his ruined child, or the unprincipled scoundrel who disgraced and abandoned the unhappy girl?”

“Herr Regierungsrath,” replied the count, who this time succeeded in replying calmly, and even with a certain amount of dignity, for he now spoke the truth, “I have suffered as deeply as any one in consequence of your daughter’s misery, and most bitterly deplored the force of circumstances which compelled me to part from her.”

Lorsberg’s only reply was a short, bitter laugh, so full of wrathful scorn that the count was still more alarmed. But he again forced himself to calmness, and continued: “I acknowledge, with

no little sorrow, that you have every reason to load me with reproaches, but I confess I cannot understand why, after allowing this painful matter to rest for years, you should now overwhelm me with upbraidings, and express your anger with such unmeasured violence."

"So I ought to be mild and gentle, confine myself strictly to the smooth, polished forms of society, while all the torment of the memory of my lost honor is raging within me? The gentleman probably thinks his villainy is condoned by time; but even though, as a nobleman, you may have learned little enough, you ought at least to know that crime is not outlawed like debt."

"I did not intend to say I was not ready to answer for any of my former acts," replied Count von Steinthal, with a shade of his usual haughty manner; "I merely wished to express my surprise that you should suddenly appear so violently infuriated against me to-day, when for so many years you have maintained an indifferent silence."

"I was not silent from indifference, but because I was ignorant of the circumstances," replied Lersberg, in a dull, hollow tone. "It was only in my wife's dying hour that I learned the full extent of your guilt towards my daughter. Before that I had no suspicion how low the unhappy girl had fallen."

The count gasped for breath. His enemy's last words fairly crushed him, and the calmness for

which he had struggled so violently, again deserted him. He now understood why, after so many years, Lorsberg appeared before him in such furious wrath; he now knew that no mercy, no amicable arrangement was possible. He must avert by force the punishment which had come upon him, or submit to it with resignation. Overwhelmed by this bitter knowledge, he cowered back in despair.

Lorsberg's violence seemed to have exhausted itself; he gazed at his opponent contemptuously, and then calmly made his demand. "The mystery of my appearance here, and my long delay, is now solved," said he. "Your own conscience, weak and pitiful as it is, must tell you that we can only meet as *enemies*, and that I have come to revenge myself upon you."

"But, good heavens, what do you desire? What satisfaction can I give you now that poor Helene—"

"Do not utter that name—What do I desire? If my power was equal to my will, if human strength was not limited by subtle laws which protect the criminal from the vengeance of those he has injured, I would bring a worse misfortune than death under this roof. But as it is, I demand the only thing that is left for me to ask—your life."

"My life?"

"Don't be so startled," exclaimed Lorsberg with his former sneering laugh. "True, you murdered

the happiness and honor of my house *by stealth*; but I am no assassin. I came to ask it honorably, as men call it, and you have every advantage on your side; you can choose time, place, and weapons."

"I cannot fight with you, Herr Regierungsrath."

"Cannot? Do you not consider me your equal?"

"Oh! no, no, not that; but—"

"Pitiful scoundrel! No, I did not believe you so utterly destitute of courage and honor. But it shall not avail you. We are subjects of the same government, I am Ober-Regierungsrath in our sovereign's service; as such my rank is equal to that of a general in the army. You, as a former captain of cavalry, cannot refuse to give me satisfaction, especially since, as I have learned, you are an officer of the Land-wehr."

The count waved his hand deprecatingly. "However great cause you may have to reproach me," said he, "I cannot permit you to call me a coward. I consider you my equal, but I cannot fight with *you*—with Helene's father. Any other antagonist you may send, I will cheerfully meet upon any conditions."

"So long as I live, you will have no other antagonist in my cause than myself."

"But I entreat you, I implore you, not to force me to add another injury to the wrong which, to my own deep remorse, I have already inflicted upon you. You are an old man, unaccustomed to the

use of weapons. In a duel one is as little master of himself as of accidents, and if I should have the misfortune to wound you fatally—it would be the most terrible thing that could befall me.”

“Would that it might befall you, although it is scarcely probable that the arm of a father seeking vengeance will be weaker than yours. The slow murder you dealt to that unhappy girl has doubtless weighed lightly upon your aristocratic conscience; a second, more rapid death-blow, might perhaps, in some degree, imbitter your life.”

The count and his angry guest had both been too deeply absorbed in their exciting conversation to heed anything else, and neither of them noticed that the door of the drawing-room had opened noiselessly a short time before. Louise, who saw her father leave the room with such a strikingly troubled manner directly after receiving Lorsberg's card, had felt the greatest anxiety about him, although she would have been unable to give a reason for it, even to herself. But when her father did not return, her anxiety increased to positive fear. Young as she was, she already had a great aversion to anything which could attract attention, or lead to a violent scene; perhaps this proceeded from the fact that there were many things in her parents' married life which, even to the eyes of so young a child, seemed better to be concealed from strangers.”

She therefore noiselessly left the drawing-room

and entered the smaller apartment, where, as she learned from the servant, her father was holding a loud, animated conversation with the stranger.

Meantime her absence did not remain as unnoticed as she supposed. Baroness von Dornick had observed the count's departure, as well as his change of manner, nor did it escape her attention that his daughter also left the room in evident anxiety. As in addition to her practical qualities, she also possessed an eager curiosity, she resolved if possible to learn what all this meant.

"Wasn't the count well, Therese?" she asked.

"Oh yes, nothing is the matter with him;" replied the anxious wife very calmly.

"But it is a long time since he left the room, and he looked very pale when he went out."

"But he did not complain of anything, and he often changes color," was the quiet reply.

"I don't understand why you should try to make Therese anxious, *ma chere*," said the baron. "Your good sense is certainly deserting you. It is surely very natural a man should look rather pale on the day of his father's funeral."

"Perhaps it is not anything else, but Louise seemed anxious," persisted the baroness. "She followed her father, and has not yet returned."

The countess, although really by no means alarmed, thought it would appear better not to treat her cousin's apparent uneasiness too lightly. She therefore followed her husband, and entered

the little salon just in time to hear her daughter exclaim with very unusual vehemence: "I don't know you, sir, but whoever you may be, you are a bad man to vex my papa so, and on the very day of grandpapa's funeral."

The countess, in spite of her astonishment, maintained her usual cold self-possession, and waited silently at the door, in order, if possible, before interfering, to obtain a clear understanding of the extraordinary scene.

At the young girl's words, the stranger suddenly turned towards her, started back in amazement, and pointing to her with a trembling hand, asked, gasping for breath: "Who is this child?"

The count made no reply, but turned to his daughter and said sternly: "Leave us, Louise."

She did not obey; but seizing his arm, fearlessly replied: "No, father, I will not go so long as this angry, wicked man is with you."

"Father? He, her father!" exclaimed Lorsberg, in violent agitation. But there were other feelings than anger and hate striving within him, and grasping the count's arm he again repeated: "Who—who is this child?"

For a moment the count was astonished at the evident change in his enemy's appearance; then Louise's strange likeness to the unfortunate Helene occurred to him, and he replied: "She resembles Helene, and it affords me pleasure, though a pain-

ful one. She is my eldest daughter, Herr Regierungs-rath, Countess Louise von Steinthal."

"Countess von Steinthal," repeated Lorsberg, grasping the Count's arm more firmly, "so she is your wife's, and not Helene's—my daughter's child." Even as he spoke a change had again passed over him; the old furious wrath resumed its sway, and when the Count shook his head in mute denial, he hurled him from him so violently that the nobleman reeled several paces backward, and touched the Countess as she rapidly approached the group.

"Whose child did you think the young lady should be?" asked the latter in her hard sharp voice.

Lorsberg made no reply, but said to the Count imperiously; "Introduce me to this lady," and utterly bewildered by the unexpected presence of his wife and daughter, the Count obeyed the command.

"So you are Countess Steinthal," continued Lorsberg, "this young girl's mother! Shall I tell you, Madame, for whom I took her? I thought she was the child my daughter bequeathed to your husband on her death-bed; it must be about the same age."

"What, sir;" exclaimed the Countess, in mingled amazement and anger.

"My error is pardonable, Madame, and easily explained," added Lorsberg, evidently rejoicing in the pain he was inflicting; this child does not resemble the Count, her father, nor does she bear

the most distant likeness to you. Feature for feature she is the perfect image of my unhappy, dishonored daughter, who seventeen years ago became the victim of your husband's generous love. This singular resemblance affords me positive proof of one thing; that your influence over the Count, great as it may be, is not sufficient to protect him from the pangs of conscience, and the memory of a fairer Past. Your own beautiful daughter is a living memento that your husband once had better taste than when he offered his hand to you."

The Regierungsrath uttered these harsh, insulting words, in a loud stern voice, then turned to the Count, and said in a low tone; "I will send my son to you to-morrow, with whom you may make farther arrangements," and then left the apartment with a slow firm step.

The Count sank exhausted into a chair, and the Countess gazed after Lorsberg's retreating figure in bewilderment, but this lasted only a moment. Pale and trembling from head to foot, Louise laid her hand on her father's shoulder, and glancing from him to her mother, asked anxiously; "What does all this mean! Father,—mother—what has that terrible stranger to do with you and me?"

"Ask your father;" exclaimed the Countess, in an outburst of passion. "He will know from whence this fine guest appeared, and what gave him the right to be so insolent to me, because I have the

happiness of being your father's wife. A great happiness, a doubtful honor! Speak, Steinthal, what connection has this disgraceful scene with you and your Past?"

The Count rose. "Leave us, Louise," he said sullenly. But the young girl did not move. "Mamma is angry, papa, and you are very, very sad," she pleaded. "Let me stay with you until you are calm and happy again."

"Go, child, go," repeated the Count but he spoke in a more gentle tone and seemed more composed, and Louise, though she lingered and looked at her parents anxiously, at last left the room. Just as she was about to close the door, her mother called: "If your aunt Dornick asks any questions, tell her papa was not well and I must beg her to make the tea."

At last the door was shut between her and her child. "Now, Steinthal, what was the meaning of that scene?" she asked, turning towards her husband with a sharp expectant look.

Steinthal had partially regained his composure, and answered with apparent calmness: "As you saw yourself, Therese, the man was excited almost to madness."

"Yes, I saw that," replied the Countess with her repellant coldness; "but I wish to learn from you what it was that had so excited him, driven him to such madness."

"How should I know?" he answered evasively;

then, urged on by his wife's angry glance to make some farther reply, added hesitatingly: "I think—it is a family misfortune."

"Family misfortune! Of what nature?"

"He lost his wife a few days ago."

"Lost his wife! And he comes to reproach you for it. Nonsense. Of what did this person die?"

"Oh! Therese, how should I know? I believe of the weakness of age."

"The weakness of age! And therefore the man is furiously enraged with you. That would certainly be perfectly absurd; but he seemed to me like a person who would be guilty of anything rather than an absurdity.—You do not answer me? I beg you to remember, Steinthal, that I must and will have a clear understanding of this affair."

"But I know of nothing more to tell."

"Indeed? We will see. What did the man say about Louise?"

"Oh!" he replied, changing color, "he discovered some faint resemblance between her and a person whom he had formerly known."

"His daughter? What was this person's name?"

"Helene, I think."

"Ah? So you know her too?"

"Seventeen or eighteen years ago; but she has been dead a long time."

"Then she didn't die of the weakness of old age, at any rate," said the Countess.

"Despair, Madame," cried the Count, fairly

driven to extremities; "Yes, despair, because yielding to my father's wishes, I rejected her faithful love to offer my hand to you, the most heartless of women. But it was only my hand, Madame; my heart, my whole soul, have belonged solely to her, to her alone. This is the reason Countess Steinthal has the features of Helene Lorsberg, and therefore the old man believed he saw his own daughter's child in yours. He is right; she is a living memento of my martyred love; each glance I cast upon her, each tone of her voice reminds me of the fairest hours of my life, and binds me forever to the dead girl to whom I owe the only real happiness I ever enjoyed, and which I so basely repaid!"

The Countess cast upon her husband a look of the bitterest contempt, and replied in a cold, repellant tone: "And so you take me for some weak pitiful creature! Yet do not imagine that your dark past was unknown to me, or that what you call love could make me happy, or its absence wretched. I gave you my hand because it made me Countess Steinthal, and because I knew that, as such, I should have complete authority over my property and my children; for I had perceived long before what a weak, commonplace man you were. Thus I have neither made any special discovery, nor need you suppose that the insight I have obtained into your life will have any power to disturb the repose of mine. The only change which has occurred is that I despise you even more than be-

fore," and turning away with an expression of the most extreme contempt she left the room with a firm steady step.

The duel between the Count and the Regierungsrath took place a few days after. The Count was uninjured but his antagonist received a slight wound, although Steinthal had intended to spare him, while Lorsberg's sole thought was to shoot down his enemy. There were no legal consequences, but it finally resulted in Lorsberg's death. The furious anger still raging in the soul of the wounded man caused fever to set in, and in less than a month after the grave closed over his wife, his own was dug beside it. His most ardent desire, that of avenging himself upon the deceiver of his unhappy daughter, seemed baffled, and it was only in the last days of his sickness that his regret for it yielded to better thoughts, and to the conviction that he himself was not wholly blameless, and must forgive if he hoped to be forgiven.

Yet it would be an error to suppose he had failed to avenge his daughter; he had fully attained his sad object. True, Count Steinthal lived on undisturbed in apparent comfort; nothing in his outward circumstances seemed altered since his interview with the father of his early love. But it was only in his outward circumstances; he had formerly lived a cold joyless life—but since Lorsberg's appearance at Miltenberg it had become one of actual unhappiness. His wife's indifference had changed

to open, marked aversion, and he retorted with equal sharpness. Worse than all, it was not only the husband and wife who stood in hostile relations towards each other—even poor innocent Louise was drawn into the unholy strife. Ever since the evening Madame von Steinthal had heard Lorsberg's words about the young girl's resemblance to his daughter, she seemed to have taken a dislike to her own child, while her husband, with whom Louise had always been the favorite daughter, loved her from that hour with a still warmer, more passionate affection. This preference and dislike soon caused now open and now concealed reproaches and innuendoes between the parents.

However much Louise, though remarkably wise and prudent for her years, might strive to avoid such contests, she was generally forced to take part in these unhappy quarrels; for it was natural, under such circumstances, that she should grow colder and colder towards her mother, who rarely gave her a kind word but always had some sharp rebuke or keen reproach for her. All the love in her nature turned towards her father, who was always ready to protect, defend, and console her. Yet she could not consider him as that image of stainless honor and integrity, which a father should always appear to an affectionate child. She gave him her love without being able to add her respect, for the latter had been greatly shaken by Lorsberg's words, perhaps all the more because she but dimly under-

stood what the excited stranger said, and also because she could not fail to perceive that her mother drew from the events of that evening dark accusations and reproaches against her father, which evidently wounded him deeply, but which he never sought to disown. To her mother, on the contrary, she could not refuse her respect. The Countess' firm, self-reliant nature, her steady, in a certain sense, reliable manner of deciding upon her own acts and those of her family, commanded the esteem of older and more experienced persons—how much more that of a young girl! Yet Louise could not fail to perceive that her mother was cold and unloving, especially towards herself, and thus early became accustomed to believe no longer in the perfect goodness and stainless purity of anything, and though endowed by nature with a warm, loving heart, was deprived of one of the brightest joys of youth: that of forming an ideal of pure spiritual beauty, and being able to hope for the possibility that it may some day be realized. Never did she hope for any special joy, or weave glad youthful visions of a vague but beautiful future. She became prematurely cold and calculating; for while she expected no happiness she wished to secure herself against misfortune. To all this was added an hereditary and carefully fostered pride; and before Countess Louise Steinthal reached her nineteenth birthday, she was even colder, haughtier, and more self-reliant than her mother.

CHAPTER X.

LEO'S RETURN.

"And when did you leave Rotterdam?" said Herr Berger to his son Leo, who had just returned from England.

"The evening of the day before yesterday, father. I might have been here sooner; but we had a rough passage, and I felt tired and remained over night in W."

"Why you could certainly allow yourself that little time."

"Yes, papa, but when a man has seen none of his friends for four years, he feels a great longing to get home."

"Four years! Is it really four years! True, you were two years in London, and two in Liverpool."

"I hope, father, you are satisfied with the connections I have commenced and partly concluded."

"The connections?" asked the merchant, as if his attention had been wandering and he was forced to collect his thoughts. "Ah! yes," he

continued, and a shadow rested upon his face as he added: "People cannot be sufficiently careful how they make connections now-a-days."

At these words the young man looked at his father more earnestly, and was startled to see how old he appeared. But the shadow vanished from his brow, and with it a little of the anxious, care-worn expression. Leo felt relieved, and said cheerfully: "I hope you have not met with losses through any of the firms with which I have brought you in connection; they are all houses of high standing, and perfectly safe."

"May be so, may be so," replied the old man, and the shadow re-appeared more distinctly, and darker than before; "but as I said just now, people can hardly be careful enough."

"You make me anxious. Tell me, have the firms I recommended been in any way injurious to you?" And as the merchant kept silence, Leo continued, as if speaking to himself: "I can't think so; there are no more respectable, solid houses in England."

His father pushed the bottle of Burgundy towards him that he might fill his glass, offered him the box of cigars, gazing at him all the time with a grave, thoughtful look, and as Leo was trying to light one, asked suddenly, "What do you think of the house of C. & Co. in K.?"

"Father, do you think—" asked Leo, raising his eyes in alarm, so strangely sharp was the tone.

"Why, of course. I mean the banking house of C. & Co. Whom else should I mean?"

"Yes, yes! But you don't suppose---you don't think---it couldn't---? What, you shake your head! That old house is as firm as Rome."

"Do you think so? True, everyone believes it. Well---*I* did not make the connection with that house, it was formed in your grandfather's time."

"Yes, that is true," Leo assented, not a little surprised by the gloomy manner in which his father alluded to the old, well-known firm. "I remember that C. & Co., were often mentioned in grandpapa's lifetime."

"And if that were not so," said the merchant, "the books would prove it." Then he relapsed into silence, and gazed absently before him.

Leo felt more and more uneasy. He had been affectionately welcomed by his father on his arrival scarcely two hours before; the old gentleman had noticed with evident pleasure his son's handsome person, and quiet, manly bearing, and had assured him over and over again, with the utmost warmth, of his happiness in having him back once more. But then he became silent, variable, and absent-minded, and his evident struggle to rouse himself from his thoughts was unsuccessful. What could have produced such an effect upon the usually clear headed, and remarkably cheerful man? Was he ill, or had he some hidden sorrow or care? Leo vainly puzzled over the matter, and at last, half to

break the painful silence, half because he desired to hear some news of his brother, said: "You have told me nothing about Rudolph, father."

"About Rudolph? Yes, but what have I to tell? We will go over to M. in a few days; you probably wish to see him again."

"Certainly, I am very anxious to do so. But what sort of a person is his wife?"

"Oh! she is a most charming, clever little woman, and belongs to a good family, as you know. The Hagendorfs have been established in M. two hundred years, and always conducted their business with success as well as prudence. There are only two children besides my daughter-in-law, her brother Gerhard, and her sister who married the merchant Brand, several years ago; that, too is a very good house."

"I believe I have heard of it. But Rudolph—has he become a partner in his father-in-law's business?"

"Certainly; and when the old man dies, he will continue with his brother-in-law, Gerhard Hagendorf. Or, really"—the old gentleman leaned forward over the table, and lowered his voice—"Rudolph will really manage the business alone, for between ourselves, Gerhard has very little sense, and allows himself to be guided in everything by Rudolph, which is the best thing for both."

"His sister, on the contrary, you say is a clever woman."

"She is very clever, very prudent. She governs her household by line and rule, and keeps an eye on everything. There always seems to be enough; but there is not a crumb wasted, and I sure it would not escape her if the cook peeled an extra potatoe."

"So she is an excellent housekeeper," said Leo, mechanically.

"Yes, indeed; but far more than that. She can converse upon any subject like a book, and knows how to represent it so that people are perfectly amazed. When the supervisor of the factories in M., came here a short time ago on a tour of inspection, old Hagendorf gave him a dinner, and as his wife is dead, Emma did the honors. It is a pity that you did not see her; she was in all her glory. The supervisor paid the old man one compliment after another about his charming daughter, and her exquisite manners. Your brother was almost crazy with pride."

The old man related several other traits in the character of his clever, brilliant daughter-in-law, and praised the wise choice of his eldest son, while Leo meantime became very silent, almost sad. At last he rose suddenly, and asked with evident effort, "Have you heard any news from the moor, father?"

"From the moor?" replied Berger in surprise "What moor?"

"Why, the moor—old Jost."

"'The old broom-maker!'" exclaimed Berger, and it was hard to decide whether the tone betrayed more horror or disgust. I thought *that* folly would be forgotten, my boy."

"It is no folly, father, and I have not forgotten it," replied Leo with apparent composure, although secretly trembling with agitation.

"Be reasonable, Leo," said his father sternly, "you ought to be ashamed to return to such childish follies, now you are a man."

"You are mistaken, father," replied Leo warmly, "it is no childish folly, but a deep, earnest love. It took root in my earliest boyhood, grew firmer through my innocent youth, and it has matured and strengthened during the painful separation you imposed upon us."

The old man pushed his wine-glass away so impatiently that he sadly marred the bright polish of the mahogany table, and said almost with a groan, "I really did not expect you to continue raving mad after I had allowed you so much time to come to your senses, but you may be assured of one thing; I will never give my consent to such a crazy marriage."

"But, father, when you required me to promise that for the space of two years, I would neither see Margarethe, write to her, send her a message, nor receive one from her, you promised on your side, that if after this lapse of time I could still find my happiness in a marriage with her, you would per-

mit me to provide for her education, and then make her my wife."

"I gave that promise under a mistaken impression," said Berger sullenly, "and therefore, I am not bound to fulfill it."

"Under a mistaken impression?" asked Leo, with ill-suppressed indignation. "Have I not rigidly complied with all the conditions you exacted? Have not the two years you at first required, become four?"

"I don't mean that," replied his father in the same tone, "I could not expect that after you had been given so much time and opportunity to forget your folly, and see how preposterous your wishes were, you would still be perverse enough to persist in them."

"Perverse enough? Oh! father, do you call love and faith perversity?"

"In this case, yes."

"But I cannot desert Margarethe, father; and you ought not to hold your word so lightly. It was a father's solemn promise, and it will be the heaviest possible grief to me if you break it."

"For my part," exclaimed the old man in a violent passion, "I would far rather see you unhappy than wedded to a dishonored girl. If she were only a day laborer's daughter! But, no, she is the unknown descendant of some aristocratic rake—a beggar, and branded with shame! I owe it to your brother not to consent to your insane desire. The

broom-maker's foundling! A pretty sister-in-law for Emma Hagendorf." He rose with a loud, scornful laugh, and left the room banging the door behind him.

This was Leo's first evening at home. With a heavy sigh he leaned his head upon his hand and gave himself up to a train of anxious, sorrowful thoughts. He saw clearly that it would be a great sacrifice for his father to consent to his marriage with poor Margarethe. The older he had grown, and the more he had mingled in the society of aristocratic merchants and their families, the more plainly he had perceived how reluctantly his father would consent to his wishes; but hitherto he had hoped to touch his heart by obedience and faithful zeal. Now he perceived that he had not only deceived himself, but a fresh obstacle had arisen in his brother's marriage. The Hagendorf's pride was equal to the age and wealth of their house, and they were, moreover, so full of the spirit of caste, that they considered every other calling far less honorable than that of a merchant, and looked down upon all who did not belong to the money aristocracy with far more contempt than was ever bestowed upon the burgher classes, by the aristocracy of birth. Besides, their haughtiness assumed far more unpleasant forms than that of the nobility. It expressed itself with equal egotism and want of consideration; but instead of the cold, courteous condescension by which, however insolent they

may really be, the nobles always strive to avoid any outward appearance of it, the Hagendorf's pride was often mingled with such overbearing rudeness, such want of civility, that one could scarcely give it any other name than coarseness. What would they probably say if it was suggested to them to enter into family relations with the nameless foster-child of a poor day-laborer? How pitilessly such people would reproach the young girl with her poverty, and above all with her unknown parentage.

In comparison with these personal anxieties, other cares which had been aroused by his conversation with his father, receded into the background, but he could not wholly dismiss them from his mind. His father's pre-occupation, the dark allusions to the house of C. & Co., and his frequent reveries, betrayed that he also had some secret anxiety. At any other time his filial interest in everything his father seemed to wish to conceal, would have induced him to try to fathom the secret trouble; and, besides, although not naturally a merchant, his whole education had inspired him with too much caution for him to be indifferent to the slightest warning that the house had suffered loss; but to-day, as before mentioned, he could scarcely give the matter a passing thought. He recurred again and again to his own personal griefs, and strove to find some means to make his duty as a son harmonize with his wishes as a lover. But

all his reflections showed him nothing but the one faint hope that his father's heart might at last be touched by his constant faith, and Margarethe's noble nature.

The final result of his meditations was the resolution to go to the moor early the next morning, and see Margarethe once more after their long separation. The promise he had given his father no longer bound him in this respect, and with joyful agitation he dwelt for a moment on the thought of the meeting; but the next instant the vision was clouded by an anxious doubt. How should he find Margarethe? Had she followed his requests, his wishes? Had she held aloof from the rude, coarse people who surrounded her, and sought to improve her mind in the way he had planned? Or, wearied by her solitary, joyless existence, had she gradually sunk to the level of her wretched home?

He could not longer pursue this train of thought, and left the room to seek his couch.

CHAPTER XL

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

The following morning he set out on his walk to the moor with sorrowful forebodings and a heavy heart. When he left the last houses of the city behind him, and emerged into the open country, with the beautiful fresh May morning breathing forth its fragrance around him, two other spring days he had spent on the moor, both of which had been so important and memorable, recurred to his mind. One brought back the recollection of the warm, sunny May day when he first saw Margarethe, then a poor, helpless child, sitting in a basket of wild flowers and begging for a drink of water. The other, was the day on which he took his last farewell of the blooming maiden; her face, pure and beautiful as it had looked in that hour, appeared so vividly before him that he could no longer think of any change, fear any alteration.

Thus he reached the old beech-tree, and almost wondered that Margarethe was not waiting for him under its shadow; then he saw the roof of Jost's

miserable hut appear behind the wall of earth, and thought then she would surely rush joyfully to meet him, and so at last ascended the hillock with a beating heart. Jost's cottage stood before him; but no Margarethe appeared.

The old broom-maker was sitting before the house on the wooden block, with the dry heather, wet bark, and a pile of finished brooms around him. His face was as bronzed, and his bristling hair as thick as ever, but the locks had grown white, and the old man's back seemed somewhat more bowed than before. Things could not have gone badly with him, for the wooden gable of the house was neatly mended, the windows and door were freshly painted, and the garden had a pretty new fence.

At the sound of Leo's step, the old man looked up from his work, laid the half-finished broom on his knee, and opened his eyes in astonishment as he looked at the fashionably attired young man before him.

"Good morning, Jost. Don't you know me?" cried Leo.

Jost arose and went slowly forwards to meet his visitor, without making any other reply than a stiff, thoughtful shake of the head.

"How is Gretchen?" continued Leo. "Is she at home?"

"Oh! oh!" replied Jost, opening his eyes still wider. "Lord have mercy on us! Is it really *he*?"

"Of course it is I," said Leo holding out his hand. "Do you know me at last, old friend?"

"I would never have believed it," murmured Jost, shaking his head, "never."

"What wouldn't you have believed, Jost?" asked Leo, his eyes wandering from the window to the door, and then to the garden.

"That the gentleman would ever have come back again."

"I know," replied Leo with a troubled expression, "I was obliged to stay away much longer than was first proposed. But Margarethe, did not she believe I would return?"

Jost looked at him in surprise, and answered: "Lord, how can he ask me that? I don't know."

"Don't know? Does she never speak of me?"

"Why, sir, I don't know that either."

"Don't know? Jost, what does this mean? But let me speak to her myself. Call her, or let me go in."

As he was hurrying by the old man to enter the house, the latter stopped him. "What does he want there?" Jost said to himself, in still greater perplexity. "Does he think she is still here? No, that's too silly. Don't he know she has been gone a long time?"

"Gone," cried Leo turning pale. "And a long time ago? My God, where is she? Jost, for Heaven's sake, tell me where she is."

Jost shook his head: "No, I must not."

"You must not? But who can have forbidden you? Yet I need not ask—my father."

"No, no, he knows nothing about it himself."

"My father knows nothing about it. But you, Jost, you must surely know where she is."

"I? yes, of course I know," replied Jost with his sly smile; "but what good will that do you, sir?"

"None, unless you tell me; but you will surely do that?"

"No, I surely will not; I have already told you I must not."

"Who can have forbidden you?"

"No one, unless I choose to have it so," replied the broom-maker with a flush of pride. "He is quite right there. When I say 'I must not,' I mean I won't."

Leo saw that it would be a difficult matter to conquer the old man's obstinacy. and overwhelmed by grief, sank exhausted upon the broom-maker's rough seat. Jost kept silence for some time; but when he saw the young man, whom he had always seen so gay, bright and animated, looking so pale, and gazing so sadly into vacancy, he was moved with compassion. "I am sorry for the young gentleman," said he, "but I can't help him, and even if he knew where she was, he would be no better off than he is now."

"Yes, yes, Jost, I should know whether I might still hope, or at least the reason why I must resign all hope. I beg you at least to tell me as much of what has happened, as you can without doing violence to your conscience."

"I believe the gentleman is right," said Jost, seating himself thoughtfully on the pile of heather opposite Leo. "If he can't hear from me where she is, he shall know how it came about. But his father has nothing to do with it; he only came twice, at first, before she went away."

"So my father was here?" asked Leo, with newly roused suspicion.

"Yes, and he wanted to persuade me to send her away into some service which he said he had found for her; but I wouldn't and couldn't. The child was placed in my care, and if I didn't wish to keep her I needn't; but only her relatives had a right to provide for her in any other way."

"Her relatives? Does she know them?"

"Yes, one," replied Jost curtly.

"Who is he? Where does he live?"

"That is what the gentleman won't find out from me."

"But why not, Jost?"

"The gentleman, the gentleman who is related to her, I mean, bound me on oath to tell nobody, especially you. As I saw that this gentleman was right, and that it was best for you as well as for her if you never saw Margarethe again, I solemnly promised never to betray his name or where he lives to anyone."

"But, Jost, do listen to reason. What harm can it do Margarethe or me to see each other again?"

Jost shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know,

sir; but I think many things might happen that would do no good, and I don't believe any good could come of it."

"Why not, Jost? I am sure Margarethe has not forgotten me, any more than I her. Why should we not marry if we are still faithful to each other?"

"Has his father given his consent?" asked Jost, dryly.

"He promised it before I went to England," replied Leo evasively.

"And now," said Jost, half to himself, "the old gentleman will keep quiet because he knows Margarethe has gone, and I won't tell the young master where she is."

"Does my father know that?" asked Leo eagerly. "He did not utter a syllable about it."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Jost. "His papa is very wise; he thought he would hear it soon enough if he came to the old broom-maker. That is," he continued addressing himself directly to Leo, "the old gentleman knows she has gone, but nothing more, and is contented to have it so."

Leo fully believed the old man, and asked whether he would not tell him how long Margarethe had been away, in what circumstances she was living, and whether he thought her position would be better, hoping in this way to learn something which might serve him as a clue in the inquiries he intended to commence without delay. But the old man

was very crafty. He said that an old gentleman, her mother's uncle, had taken Margarethe away more than three years before, that she was living with him, and reared like a princess, could play on the piano, embroider bright colored flowers, and paint. She had visited him twice since she went away, and each time drove up in a carriage with her great-uncle. The last visit was made a month ago. She always brought with her money, and articles of value; bags full of tobacco, coffee, sugar, rice, and flour, far better than they had ever had in the house before, and new clothes for himself and Ann-Trine. The last time she had also had the house painted, and the roof mended. She went to see Annchen, of Nordhecke, too, and gave her a handsome black dress.

No questions no matter how cunningly worded, no entreaties, however urgent, could induce the old man to disclose anything farther concerning the residence and circumstances of his former foster-child. His own opinion of the matter, as well as the promise he had given, seemed to make his silence impenetrable. The only concession Leo could obtain, was that he would tell Margarethe and her uncle of his visit, and urgent entreaty to be allowed a speedy meeting with his beloved, the next time he wrote to them through the schoolmaster. But Jost also informed him that the schoolmaster would not write at present. It had been arranged that Margarethe should hear from him every three months;

and it was only four weeks since she left the moor, so she would not have a letter for two months. Nothing could induce the old man to yield anything more, and he concluded with his cunning smile: "The young gentleman is mistaken if he thinks he can get the address from the schoolmaster; for he don't know it himself. Old Jost takes the letter to a gentleman he can't name, and he attends to it."

Depressed and saddened, Leo took leave of the old man who looked after his retreating figure with a troubled glance. Indifferent as he had appeared, he was far too much attached to the young fellow not to sympathize with his grief, and his rough nature was touched by Leo's constancy. But he knew old Berger's pride, and the stain which rested upon Margarethe, and was determined to do nothing to bring about a marriage from which he could foresee no good result.

Instead of going directly home, Leo went round to see Anna of Nordhecke. The little old woman was amazed at his visit, and repeatedly expressed her astonishment that Fraulein Gretchen was right the first time she came there and said Leo had not forgotten her. But when she was there last Easter, she no longer thought Herr Berger would still remember her, and said it was better for him. The next time the schoolmaster wrote, Fraulein Gretchen should learn everything; for even if they were never permitted to see or speak to each other again, she

certainly ought to know, because it would please her to hear good things of him.

The sympathy Margarethe's old friend showed him, induced Leo to hope that he might learn from her farther particulars of his vanished love. But in this respect she was as firmly bound by promises, and as resolute as old Jost himself. She said Fraulein Gretchen plainly understood that she ought not to marry Herr Berger, and, therefore, saw herself, it would be best for them to cherish pleasant memories of each other, but to make no efforts to meet again. But sensible as the little milliner proved to be in regard to the principal matter, she was more soft-hearted than the old broom-maker, or, at any rate, more inclined to chatter. She therefore gave the attentive young man a full description of Fraulein Gretchen's costly, beautiful dresses, the dainty gold chain she wore around her neck, and the veil and flowers on her bonnet. Leo also learned that Margarethe had grown taller, and—at least in Annchen's eyes—far more beautiful, and her whole appearance was just like “one of the aristocrat's,” though she still was as simple and cordial as a child.

“And was she in good spirits?” asked Leo. “Did she seem contented and happy?”

“Well, how am I to answer?” replied Annchen. “She was very fond of the old gentleman, her uncle, who came with her; a blind man could have seen that; and he could not have been more affec-

tionate and thoughtful to his own child. But she did not seem quite so light hearted as she used to be."

This remark both pleased and grieved the young man; on the one hand it seemed to afford a proof that Margarethe was faithful to the past as well as himself, while on the other, the idea weighed upon his mind that the improvement was merely external.

He returned home just as night was closing in, and took tea with his father. The conversation turned upon the new buildings in the city, the changes that had taken place in prominent families, politics, and business interests; but neither alluded to the subject that lay nearest their hearts. The old man occasionally noticed his son's dejection, and each time it seemed to irritate and annoy him, while Leo perceived that his father was the victim of constant anxiety, which not only affected his movements, and betrayed itself in his eyes, but rendered it impossible for him to fix his thoughts for any length of time upon the subject of the conversation. He often started up, made curt, absent replies, addressed sudden questions to his son which had no connection with his previous words, or stared at him as if his most ordinary remarks were utterly incomprehensible. Thus when Leo at last found himself alone in his sleeping-room, he felt as if he had a double burden upon his heart. Besides the grief aroused by the disappointment of

his own dearest hopes, he suffered from the knowledge that his father was threatened with some misfortune, which seemed all the greater because he was unable to form any conjecture of its nature or extent.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAGENDORFS.

We now enter a handsome apartment, bright, lofty, and spacious, but so overloaded with furniture and ornaments of every description that it almost seems contracted. The articles of furniture are all good and solid, well arranged, and in perfect harmony with each other, and the eye is instantly attracted by the remarkable neatness and order of the room. It is no state-chamber; the piano, a small book-case, a work-table, and a basket of keys prove it to be the ordinary sitting-room of the mistress of the house, but in spite of these, it lacks the air of cheerful ease which often makes such apartments attractive and homelike, even to strangers. It was not because everything was too new that the handsome chamber lacked this special charm; the cause lay rather in the circumstance that one distinctly, though unconsciously felt, that all the manifold objects which filled the space were not there merely to be used, but rather because of the idea that people must *have* them.

At the window—but not at the one where the work-table stands—sits a tall, handsome woman. Her features are regular and intelligent; her figure slender and rounded, and her manner easy and self-possessed. With all the advantages afforded by her youthful grace, and a dress well-chosen, though almost too rich for the house, she must have been extremely attractive had not an unmistakable expression of self-consciousness, bordering upon pride, marred the fresh beautiful vision. She sits in her chair as if she had just taken it for a moment and would immediately rise again, but holds in her hand a newspaper, which she seems at this moment to be eagerly and attentively reading, yet she soon looks away as if gazing into vacancy, and then resumes her occupation with apparent interest.

Although, as before mentioned, it seems as if she had merely taken her seat by chance, she keeps it quite a long time, indeed until the door opens, and a handsome young man enters the room. Even now she does not rise, but looks upon the sheet and asks in a somewhat loud, but pleasant voice: “What time is it, Rudolph?”

“Half past three, Emma,” he answers. “It would be well for you to see that everything is in order.”

“That was done long ago,” replied the lady.

“But I see no preparations, my dear child.”

“None here, of course, but—”

“But,” interrupted the young man in astonish-

ment, "do you intend to receive papa and Leo in the drawing-room? That would be quite too stiff and ceremonious."

"I do not think so," replied Emma, not without a certain sharpness in her tone, "You surely ought to know by this time, that it is not my custom to receive my guests behind coffee-pots and mountains of cake, like your father's old housekeeper."

An expression of annoyance appeared on the young man's face, but he controlled himself, and said quietly, "Very well, Emma. If you say you have prepared everything, I'm satisfied, even if I don't see it."

"And you may be," replied the beautiful woman, her good-nature again restored. "But I wanted to call your attention to something I have just found in the paper. D—— is playing in K. We must go over there to see him in a few days."

"My dear child, I am afraid it is impossible."

"I hope you will not deny me so great a pleasure, Rudolph."

"I do so very unwillingly, Emma. You know how gladly I gratify all reasonable wishes; but—"

She interrupted quickly, almost violently: "But you think *this* wish unreasonable? I do not understand you, Rudolph. If I were still unmarried, every one would think it a matter of course for Emma Hagendorf to go to K. to see D—— act. But, to be sure, Frau Berger is not Emma Hagendorf, and her husband considers it a very prepos-

terous request for her to ask him to take her to K. to visit the theatre."

"Emma, Emma, how you do fly into a passion," replied the young husband, who was as much irritated as his wife. "Who has thought your wish unreasonable? Who talked about preposterous requests? Certainly not I."

"No; but you refused, and thereby showed what you thought of my wish," replied the lady in a very sharp tone.

"If you would allow me to finish what I was going to say," observed Rudolph growing more and more angry.

"That is what you always do. As soon as you have said anything that hurts my feelings, you declare I would not let you finish."

The young man's anger now broke forth openly. "This is not to be endured," he exclaimed in a still louder tone. "I hurt your feelings because I regretted that it would be impossible for me to accompany you to K. You drive me too far, Emma; a saint could not keep his patience?"

"A saint!" she exclaimed with a jeering laugh. "I never heard of a stubborn saint, and that you are stubborn, my friend, I suppose you will hardly deny."

"I, stubborn? No one ever accused me of it before," cried the young man, growing still more angry. "How will you prove it?"

"That is no difficult matter," answered Frau

Berger with mocking composure, which increased her husband's irritation. "I need only express a wish or make a proposal, to be sure that you will want to do the contrary. If this is not stubbornness, I know nothing about that estimable quality."

"If you would only hear my reasons!" he exclaimed.

"Reasons? Have you any reasons? But pray spare me a litany of large expenditures and unnecessary expense. I am a daughter of the firm, and know how far I can go."

"I never thought of alluding to such matters; the expense, of course, was not the reason why I thought I should be unable to gratify your wish. You can, however, go to K. yourself; Gerhard will accompany you."

"Gerhard," she interrupted with a fresh burst of indignation; "you surely know that I will not appear in any strange place with him. Here one can go in his company; for every one knows and respects the name of Hagendorf; but it is very different there, where we are not known."

"True, there people would not respect the son of the firm," said Rudolph, dryly. "Well, perhaps your father will accompany you; I shall not be able to do so, as I said before, because I shall probably be obliged to go to D. to-morrow, or the day after, to remain several days."

"To D. for several days?" asked his wife in astonishment, leaving—probably out of curiosity—the

sarcasm upon the firm unnoticed. "What have you to do in D., and why must you stay so long?"

"Business, child, and business of considerable importance."

"Do you still retain an interest in your father's business?"

"Yes, in various ways. My share of my mother's property is still invested in it, as well as Leo's; for when my brother went to England it was arranged that my portion should be paid me on his return, because at that time he was under age, and my dead mother wished to have her sons receive her bequest at the same time. When we were married, a year after Leo's departure, and several months after he attained his majority, my father offered to pay me the sum then due, and place Leo's portion at his disposal, but your father declined the proposal on the pretext that he did not wish the existing arrangement to be disturbed on your account, and proposed to divide the Berger property into three equal portions, one of which was to be given to me, and the second to Leo, while my father was to retain the third; and this portion, whether it increased or diminished, was to be equally divided at his death, between Leo and myself.

Emma listened to her husband with an attentive interest which only a woman who took a real merchant's interest in money matters could bestow. "You say," she replied, "my father declined the

payment of your mother's inheritance on the *pretext* that the arrangement with your brother ought not to be disturbed. Do you think that was not the real reason why he made a different proposal to your father?"

"Old Hagendorf," said Rudolph with a peculiar smile, "is a clever merchant; he understands how to calculate. In the first place, he rightly supposed that my third of my father's present property would be much larger than half of my mother's legacy, and thus the firm of Hagendorf would be more benefited by the former plan than the latter. In the second place, even the most clever and cautious merchant may meet with reverses, especially in such times as we had three years ago, when the beginning of the July revolution threatened the peace of all Europe. If the Berger firm should meet with misfortunes, it would affect me very little; for my mother's fortune is so secured that, even in case of failure, the creditors could not touch it, and of all that I could expect from my father, only a small portion remained in his hands at our marriage."

"Yes, my father is very sharp-sighted," said Emma with an expression which showed her sincere approbation of old Hagendorf's prudent, but selfish management. "But your father—did he not see through his designs?"

"Old Berger," replied Rudolph with the same ironical smile, "is no less keen-sighted than the head

of the Hagendorf firm. He not only saw through your papa's views, but told him plainly that he perceived his design; but thought it fully justified by its motive, anxiety for the welfare of his daughter and son-in-law, and added, that our future was no less dear to him than to *your* father, and for this reason he would willingly accede to his request."

"That was very handsome in him," said Emma, gravely, with an approving glance.

"Certainly," said Rudolph, "and I was very glad, first, because our marriage thus escaped the painful discussions which so easily spring from questions of *meum* and *tuum*, and, secondly, because it was best for my personal advantage. But I think had Leo been your husband instead of me, your father would not have found it so easy to induce mine to consent to his wishes."

"Why?"

"Well, Leo was never a special favorite of papa's; he has not the true mercantile spirit, and it vexes the old gentleman. Besides, that affair with the peasant girl made him furious with the foolish fellow."

"I can't blame your father for either. A merchant who does not enter into his business, heart and soul, will never accomplish anything, and how a man of good family and education can wish to throw himself away upon such a miserable creature, is utterly incomprehensible to me."

The beautiful woman was perfectly sincere; yet

she looked forward to the meeting with her young brother-in-law with a sort of impatient curiosity that had a tinge of romance. Her nature was one which united strangely opposite traits of character. Spoiled and wilful, she wished to have her own way, and always succeeded in doing so if she saw that it was for her own advantage. She was vivacious, even capable of passionate emotions, and gave herself up to them without regard to the rights and feelings of others, or the demands of duty; but always strove to control them if she perceived that they might do her an injury. She liked to find in books, or the lives of strangers, unusual events, acts, and feelings, which passed beyond the bounds of custom, but she herself was never harmed or even touched by such things, and was therefore incapable of any romance in act or judgment. In short, she had no unvarying rule of conduct, and when she governed her temper and passions, it was never from principle, but for her own advantage.

When, half an hour after the conversation just mentioned, her father-in-law arrived with his younger son, she received both with great cordiality. She understood the art of showing a warm interest, and at the same time displaying so much discrimination that one could not suppose it was lightly and carelessly bestowed, and was especially skillful in revealing her regard for a person, by some apparently insignificant word or act, without falling into the error of flattery. She had intellect

and tact enough to please men whenever she attempted to do so, and although not entirely free from vanity, to which a young and beautiful woman yields almost against her will, she had never committed the sin of coquetry. What saved her from it was difficult to decide; perhaps it might have been her early marriage with a husband, whom in her own fashion, she loved.

Her father-in-law was very fond of her, and she repaid him with the sincere respect of a child; partly because he was the head of an old and highly esteemed firm, whose great wealth and extensive business connections no one had ever ventured to doubt, which in the eyes of a daughter of a merchant of equal rank and distinction, invested him with a certain halo; partly because her father, on whose judgment she firmly relied, bore witness that he was an unusually keen-sighted, active, and well informed man; and, finally, because the great affection he showed for her aroused an answering feeling in her heart. Thus the warmth with which she received him was perfectly sincere, and made the young wife appear all the more charming. It was partly for this reason that Leo's first impression of her was a very favorable one, and perhaps the more so because his father's description had not led him to expect it.

She, herself was equally surprised at Leo's appearance and manners. The idea she had formed of him was wholly unfavorable. She had expected

to find a young man of absent, somewhat awkward manners, who would betray his impractical nature at the first glance, and at the same time possessed of a certain rude abruptness such as strikes the inhabitants of the continent so unpleasantly in the sons of Albion, in whose society Leo had been for the last four years. But, instead of the somewhat handsome, inexpressive face her fancy had pictured, Leo's frank, open features were far more regular and intelligent than his brother's. His glance was clear and resolute, his manners assured, and so polished that Emma was forced to acknowledge that, in this respect, at least, he had no peer in all her circle of acquaintances. But if she had expected to find him listless and dull in conversation, she had utterly deceived herself. He talked quietly, but very cleverly, and it was perfectly evident that he not only knew what he was saying, but perfectly understood what he meant to convey.

"And this," thought Emma while she seemed to be listening to a conversation between his father and Herr Hagendorf, who had come in to greet the guests, "this is the man who wanted to throw himself away upon a miserable peasant girl. Impossible! Of course she could form no judgment of his ability as a business man, but his other powers seemed to have been unusually cultivated for one of his station. Leo was deeply interested in all the prominent questions of the day, whether they concerned the domain of industry, politics, art, or science.

In the course of the conversation Rudolph asked his father-in-law whether it would be possible for him to take his daughter to K. the following day, as Emma wished to see the famous actor, D——."

"I will make it possible, at any rate," said Hagendorf; "but why don't you go with your wife yourself?"

"I am afraid I cannot make arrangements to do so."

"But why not? I don't see why you can't be absent a day from the counting-room as well, or better than I."

"Certainly I can. I intend to remain away several days; for I think my best course would be to accompany my father and Leo to D. to-day, and stay there until Sunday or Monday."

"That is a very sensible wish," said old Hagendorf, with a somewhat sarcastic smile, "and I think your wife will make no objections to it. I see by her face that she has already been informed and given her consent."

"It is very kind in you to spend with us the first few days I have to pass in the old home, Rudolph," said Leo, affectionately holding out his hand to his brother, "I thank you for the wish."

The sarcastic smile appeared on Hagendorf's lips even more perceptibly. His daughter saw it, and thought, "The young gentleman isn't as cunning as my father; *he* knows what Rudolph wants much better."

Rudolph returned the pressure of his brother's hand, with some surprise, and said dryly: "Of course we shall be together in the old house if I come to D.; but I had something else in view when I made the proposal."

"Well, of course you will visit me too," replied his father; "but I shall not take it amiss if you confess that, this time, your brother from whom you have been so long separated, is the principal person."

Rudolph's astonishment increased as he saw his shrewd father, from whom he did not expect anything of the kind, impute to him a degree of family affection, of which he knew himself to be totally guiltless. "But father—" he began impatiently. The old man, as if he had not noticed the interruption, calmly continued. "I regret so much the more that I must request you to defer your visit a week or ten days."

"Defer it? What does that mean, father?"

"It is plain enough," replied old Berger demurely. "If you regret to have the gratification of your desire to spend a few days with Leo delayed, you are wise enough to see that business is more important than pleasure."

This was too much for Rudolph. His was not one of those weak natures which are embarrassed by having good qualities attributed to them which they are conscious they do not possess; on the contrary, it made him angry, and he now replied in a

tone which he scarcely ever permitted himself to use towards his father: "Leo, always Leo! I had no thought of him; we shall certainly enjoy the pleasure of his society sufficiently to-day. It never entered my head to visit you except on account of business matters, and as I have managed to endure my brother's absence four years, without grieving myself to death, I can do so still longer."

Emma knew why Rudolph wished to go to D.; but although she thought the motive far more sensible than the one his father and brother imagined, she would gladly have had his insulting words unspoken. She cast a hasty glance at her brother-in-law to discover what impression they had made upon him. His face was deeply flushed; but she could not decide whether from indignation or shame, and she had no time to observe him more closely; for her attention was claimed by the words her father-in-law now uttered with cutting coldness:

"I am glad to hear it, for as I said before, we shall not be able to receive you until the first of next month, as I am particularly busy, and Leo leaves to-morrow to be absent a week or ten days."

"Could not that be deferred, dear father?" said Leo in a beseeching tone.

"No, my boy, there is too much at stake."

"At stake? What is at stake?" asked Rudolph, with an interest by no means delicate.

A stern glance from Leo, beneath which Emma

blushed, spite of her usual self-possession, seemed to say the same thing ; but he took no notice of it, and fixed his attention solely on his father, who replied with his usual composure : "I have a considerable claim against a merchant in Bergefort, on the frontier of the Netherlands."

"Wenniger, perhaps," interrupted Rudolph eagerly.

"Yes, I have received certain information that he will fail in a few days. Now, there is but *one* lawyer in Bergefort, a shrewd, skillful old fellow ; it would therefore be a critical matter for us if we did not win him for our side, and might be especially injurious if he should be made syndic of the stock. Although my claims are perfectly genuine, they are somewhat complicated, and legal assistance can do much for a poor merchant. I should go to Bergefort, myself, if I could ; but as I shall be detained at home a week or ten days by various business matters, Leo must set out early to-morrow morning and try to win the Justizrath over to our cause."

Such reasons were perfectly convincing to Rudolph, and with a desire to make amends for what had passed, he said : "I beg your pardon, father, I did not know it."

"Of course you could not know it. But another time, don't be so rude when your father makes an arrangement of whose cause you are ignorant. Now you can take advantage of the interval until

Leo's return, to go with your charming wife to the theatre at K. I will send word as soon as he comes back, that you may come to us without delay. We have some business matters to settle about your mother's legacy, which can be transacted at the same time."

"That was the very reason I intended to go to D," said Rudolph in a somewhat lower tone.

"Very well, then our plans will agree," said old Berger, and as he calmly uttered the words in his usual quiet manner, Hagendorf's face, which for the last few minutes had betrayed some little uneasiness, much as he had striven to conceal it, visibly brightened. No one had observed this, however, except his daughter who knew every change of expression, but she had been unable to guess the cause. Now, however, she justly concluded that her father had been afraid Berger wished to put forward some pretext to defer the settlement with his son, and was glad that this did not seem to be the case.

Hasty steps, and a loud disagreeable voice sounded in the hall, then some one knocked; and at the same instant the door opened and a young man with a rather stout, clumsy figure, and plain face, entered the room, threw his cap upon the piano, and nodded to old Hagendorf and his daughter. Then he turned to Leo and his father, to whom he offered his hand, exclaiming with incredible rapidity: "'Morning Herr Berger! 'Morning Herr Leo!

Just arrived? Had a pleasant journey? Things go well in England? Haven't been home long yet? Well, welcome to M. But you can't be satisfied here. I couldn't, if I'd been away so long. I wish I could go, but papa won't let me, and there's nothing going on in M. Horribly stupid here; we shall see how long you'll stay."

Leo had been prepared to find Rudolph's brother-in-law almost an idiot, but the reality even surpassed the sorrowful idea he had formed. He was painfully affected by the young man's behavior, less on his own account than for the sake of his father and sister, who both showed a shade of embarrassment. Young Hagendorf, on the contrary, did not seem to feel that there was anything wrong with him which was the most helpless symptom of all.

Emma's keen eyes instantly perceived how unpleasantly Leo was affected by her brother's conduct, and made an attempt to put a stop to it by taking advantage of the customs of society. "I believe the gentlemen do not yet know each other," said she. "My brother Gerhard—my brother—"

The attempt failed. Gerhard interrupted the introduction with aloud laugh. "Gracious, Emmchen!" he exclaimed, "for Heaven's sake don't think other people stupid, because you fancy yourself so clever. Do you suppose Herr Leo and I are so dull that we can't guess who the other is? I knew he was coming here to-day with his father, and you are so much like me that he would recog-

nize me from the resemblance. Isn't that so, Herr Leo?"

"You do bear some resemblance to my beautiful sister-in-law, Herr Hagendorf," replied Leo, bowing to both.

"But you mean I'm not so handsome," interrupted Gerhard, laughing. "Well, that's because she's a lady. You can see she is always wiser than other people. You may be thankful you have no sister; mine rules us all—my father, myself, and her husband, and she really has no right to anybody but Rudolph."

"You are perfectly unbearable to-day, Gerhard," said Emma in a tone of mingled jest and earnest

"Because I tell the truth? Don't you think it's the truth, Herr Leo?"

Rarely as old Hagendorf was embarrassed by his son's conduct, to which he had long been accustomed, he felt annoyed by the contrast afforded by Leo's calm, quiet manner, and exclaimed almost sternly: "You must not tease your sister now, Gerhard; we all expect to enjoy this afternoon with Rudolph's brother."

"Well, papa, if you don't want any joking, I can be serious too," said Gerhard, somewhat intimidated. "What were you talking about when I came in?"

"A little business trip young Herr Berger is about to take."

"Ah! so you intend to go on a journey, Herr

Leo. I never travel. I'll tell you what ; you might take me with you."

This proposal was by no means agreeable to Leo, and he replied evasively, "I would not advise you to join me, Herr Hagendorf ; for I fear my journey will be anything but a pleasure tour, either in its object or direction."

Old Hagendorf saw by his son's face that, spite of the indirect refusal, he had not relinquished his intention of forcing his companionship upon his new acquaintance, and therefore said, to put an end to his urgency : "It is useless for you to think of taking a journey just now ; you cannot be spared."

"Can't be spared ? You can't spare me ? Ah ! papa, that's a thing that never happened before. Why can't I be spared ?"

"Because Rudolph must go away."

"He is always going away—everybody travels about, and I am never allowed to stick my nose outside of M."

"Enough Gerhard," said his father in a tone to which the shallow-headed, but obstinate young man was accustomed to yield without opposition, and then began a conversation with Leo, in which the others joined. Gerhard alone sat silent and sulky, but eating and drinking immoderately, until the departure of the guests, of whom he took leave sullenly, as if they, and not his father had baffled his desire to travel.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MERCHANT AND HIS BOOK-KEEPER.

On the homeward drive Herr Berger sat sullenly for some time beside his son, who also said nothing. Leo's thoughts were lingering around the house he had just left, the people he had met there, and he sadly told himself that Margarethe, poor simple little moorland flower, would never, never suit such relatives, such surroundings. This cold money-loving merchant and his equally haughty daughter, would always treat her with contempt. Moreover, Emma's pride sprang from other causes than those which inspired her father; for it was very evident she was quite as conscious of the charms of her mind and person, as the wealth she possessed, or the old name she bore, and perhaps even more so of the one she had possessed in her girlhood. It was not to be denied that, from her point of view, she was justified in such pride; for she was undoubtedly beautiful, talented, and highly educated, and

in the somewhat narrow circles in which she moved, was of great importance as the daughter of old Hagendorf, and the wife of Rudolph Berger, who was highly esteemed on account of his father's wealth, and his own business ability. With what eyes would such a lady look upon poor Gretchen as a sister-in-law! How it would wound Herr Hagendorf's feelings if any one suggested to his daughter that she should receive such a poor miserable creature as a relative! How enraged Rudolph would be at the insult offered to his family and himself!"

At last, with a violent effort, old Berger roused himself from his reverie and asked, "How did you like your sister-in-law, my boy?"

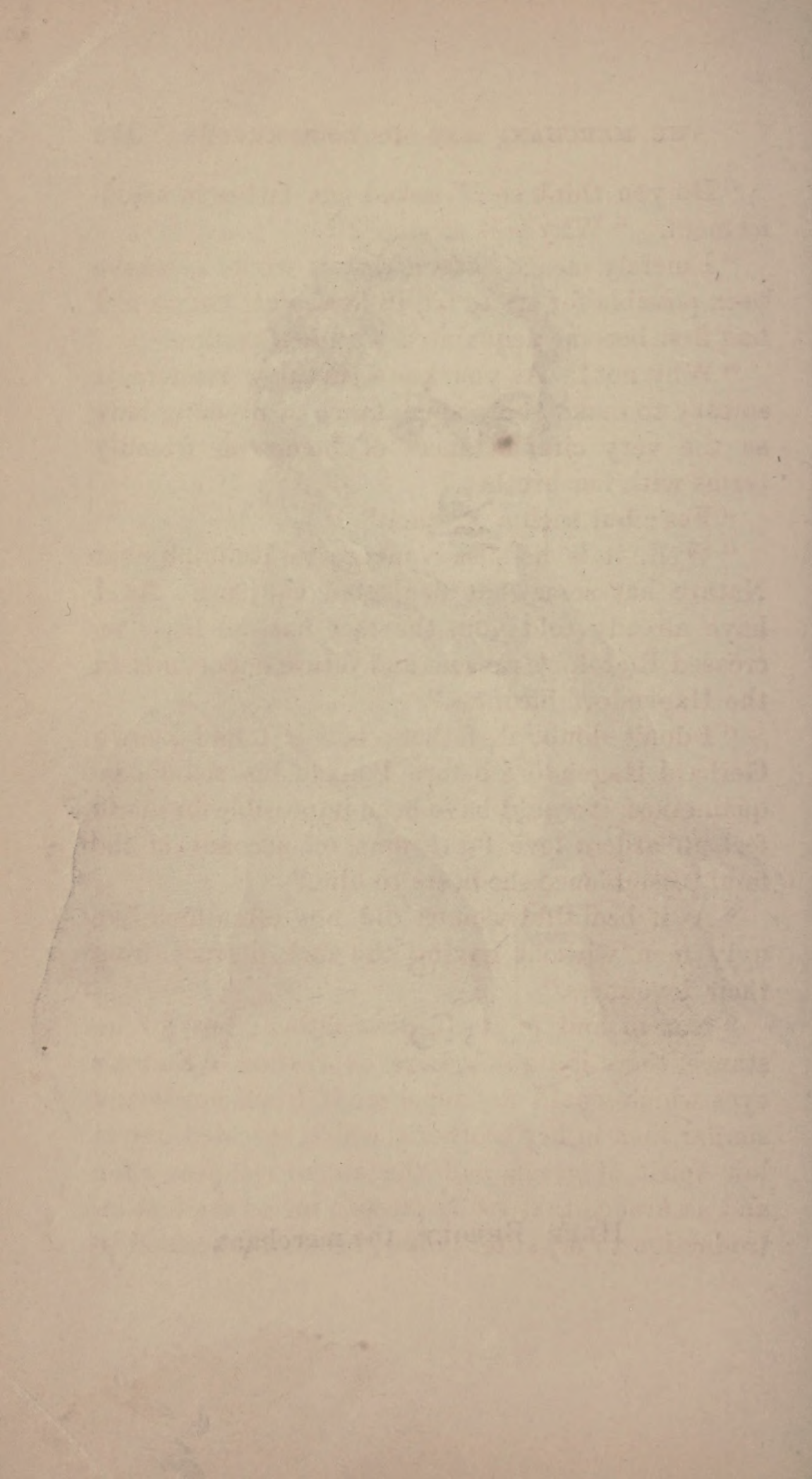
Leo replied by another question: "How did Rudolph happen to make her acquaintance, papa!"

"That is a very simple matter. Old Hagendorf wished to send his son away for a time, although he perceived that it would be of very little advantage to the poor boy; but you know it is our custom to place our sons in other houses, as clerks for a year or more. As he could not send Gerhard far from home, he applied to me, and I did him the favor of taking the lad into my counting-room as a supernumerary. Thus in the most natural manner we were brought into social relations with each other, and the acquaintance between Rudolph and Emma took place as a matter of course."

"Strange," murmured Leo.



HERR BERGER, the merchant.



“Do you think so?” asked his father in astonishment. “Why is it strange?”

“I merely meant, father, that it would not have been possible for me to fall in love with Emma if I had first become acquainted with her brother.

“Why not? As you know, nothing renders it so easy to make the acquaintance of a young lady as the very circumstances of being on friendly terms with her brother.”

“Yes; but such a brother.”

“Well, it is no disadvantage to Rudolph that Nature has somewhat neglected Gerhard. As I have already told you, the fact has no little increased Rudolph’s present and future importance in the Hagendorf business.”

“I don’t doubt it, father; but if I had known Gerhard Hagendorf before I made his sister’s acquaintance, it would have been impossible for me to feel an ardent love for Emma, on account of the fatal resemblance she bears to him.”

“As if beautiful women did not often look like ugly men, without having the fact detract from their loveliness.”

“Not in and of itself, dear father; but for instance, there is a quick, eager expression in Emma’s eyes which would not repel me if I had not seen a similar look in her brother’s, which revealed only a low spirit of greed, and the air of self-possession and assurance that really pleased me on my first introduction to my sister-in-law, because it seemed to

suit her tall, stately figure, became disagreeable as soon as I saw it reproduced in poor Gerhard's face, where though merely betraying groundless conceit, it reminded one too strongly of the proud curl of his sister's lips."

"Oh! you are a fantastic fellow," said old Berger peevishly. "What's the use of such foolish comparisons? Emma is a very dear daughter-in-law to me, and I repeat that your brother's choice does honor to himself and us. Would to God you might bring me a daughter whom I could love and esteem as highly as Rudolph's wife."

Leo was silent; for he felt more plainly than ever that on this point no understanding was possible between his father and himself. "He would never receive her into his house, never acknowledge her as a daughter-in-law!" he thought, utterly dispirited. "And yet—and yet," he added, in spite of his better judgment, "if I could only find her, all might yet be well. That she should have vanished without leaving the slightest trace behind, is the bitterest cup of all."

The next morning, several hours after Leo had set out upon his journey, his father sat in his little private office behind the counting-room with the head book-keeper, a man of about fifty years of age, with a dry, keen face, which spite of its prevailing expression of business-like shrewdness and coldness, was not destitute of a shade of kindly feeling. When the matter under discussion was settled,

Berger nodded and took up his pen as if he wished to be alone, but the book-keeper still lingered and looked at his principal, winking violently, as if to conceal the anxiety he doubtless felt must be visible in his eyes.

"Is there anything more to be said, Hensmann?" asked Berger.

"If it would not be presuming too far, Herr Berger, I should like to know how soon we shall have the pleasure of seeing Herr Rudolph in D.?"

Berger hemmed, and after a short pause, replied: "He wished to drive back with us yesterday, but will not come now until the first of next month."

"Hm! The time is short. It is not much more than a fortnight."

"It cost me trouble enough to defer his coming even so long."

"Yes, yes!" said the book-keeper, and an indescribable expression of satisfaction, almost of pride, brightened his dull features for a moment. "Herr Rudolph is sharp; yet—for the present—that is till the matter with—till matters resume their usual course, I should be very glad if he was a little more like your youngest son."

"Why, Hensmann!" replied Berger, evidently with a desire to defer for a moment the discussion of an affair, which as he well knew, he must soon arrange with his confidential employee in detail, "why, Hensmann, he is an obstinate fellow too. Yesterday, to my sorrow, I perceived that his residence in England had been utterly useless."

"I think you are mistaken, sir. Herr Leo has come back a very clever, cautious merchant. I have never doubted it since the time when, with so much wisdom and prudence, he began to make those new business connections for us in London and Liverpool."

"Oh! I'm not speaking of that, I only meant that the silly boy has not changed his views or wishes in regard to that—wench on the moor."

Hensmann looked his employer full in the face; the before mentioned expression of kindness not only appeared distinctly in his countenance, but even animated his dull eyes. "Oh!" said he, "do you call that being obstinate? I should rather say that it came from possessing a faithful heart."

"What! what do you know about faithful hearts, and such superfluous things? I thought you were old and sensible enough—"

"No, Herr Berger," interrupted the book-keeper, now as angry as his employer. "I am neither old nor sensible enough to consider a heart a superfluous thing, and with your permission, I have one myself. It will be twenty-seven years next Autumn since I entered the house as an apprentice to your late father, and from that hour my interest in the business and devotion to the firm has not known a moment's wavering."

"Why, Hensmann, are you crazy? Who doubts it, or has ever said anything about it? Interest in an old and highly respected business, devotion to a

secure and well-known firm, is entirely different from this so called love and faith bestowed on a silly girl."

"It is not so entirely different," exclaimed Hensmann, evidently irritated; "it is a plant which springs from the same soil! And," he added with an expression of intentional rudeness, striking his breast, "it thrives here too."

Herr Berger had never been so much astonished as at this moment, and could only stare at the bookkeeper in silence. The latter continued in the same tone; "And even if you had sent me four years to England, and eight years to America, for aught I care, I would not have deserted Annchen."

"Annchen? She is your wife I suppose?" asked Berger, almost gasping for breath in his amazement. "But that is an entirely different matter; first, because she is your wife, and secondly, because you are neither the son, nor the future representative of a long established firm."

"It don't alter the case because she is my wife," grumbled the bookkeeper. "Betrothed or married, it is all the same thing; the former is just as sacred to an honorable man as the latter, if there are no higher considerations to interfere, and any one who don't perceive this, allow me to say, Herr Berger, is no honest man."

"You seem to find pleasure to-day in being insolent, Hensmann. If I understood the motive I should not submit to it, but since you know as well

as I, that the higher considerations of which you speak do exist for Leo, in the most urgent degree, I don't understand your growling."

"They do not exist, that is, not yet," replied the book-keeper, not in the least intimidated, "but the time will come soon enough, only too soon, both you and I know, when Herr Leo will be obliged to save you and the firm. From what I know of him, it will be a hard task, but he will consent, and therefore you ought to have some consideration, Herr Berger, and not torture him now, when it isn't necessary."

"I must say I can't understand you at all to-day, Hensmann," replied Berger, still greatly astonished. "I always supposed that Rudolph was your favorite, and now all at once you seem very much attached to his younger brother, and act as if he were not in existence."

"And he has no longer any existence to the firm."

"No, he is now junior partner in the house of 'Hagendorf & Son-in-law.' But that does not make him lost to us; he is still my son, and Leo's brother."

The book-keeper's only reply was a sullen shake of the head, and a pause ensued, during which Herr Berger drummed on his desk with a beautiful quill pen, until it broke. At last Hensman continued: "Times change, and so do men. Herr Rudolph was always a clever lad, cunning, active, skillful, a

merchant to whom business was the first consideration, who never lost an opportunity of gain, and knew how to liquidate every loss, when to venture, and when to delay, according to existing circumstances; and to his clever and cautious counsels the firm owes many a nice sum. Was it any wonder that such a clever youth should be a favorite with both head of the house and bookkeeper."

"Certainly not, Hensmann; but I don't see why Rudolph should not be your favorite still. He is the same as ever; his father-in-law yesterday could not say enough in praise of the young man's shrewdness and caution, and the fine mercantile education I had given him."

Hensmann shook his head. "Don't you believe it?" asked the merchant, evidently displeased.

"Every word you say, Herr Berger. But, as I said before, Herr Rudolph was all this up to the day you paid him his third of the property; from that time his interest ceased. From the very moment he entered Herr Hagendorf's firm as a junior partner, he has been no more to us than the son of any other well-known house in Boston or New York."

'That is only in regard to business.'

'Yes, but to him business is everything. How strictly he settled his accounts with you. It was not like a son dealing with a father, but as a man acts towards a stranger whose honesty he has yet to test. Herr Leo, on the contrary, with the most

implicit confidence, left everything to his papa and my humble self."

"To be sure," said Berger shrugging his shoulders, "and thereby confirmed what you always said—'that he was no business man.'"

"But he is one," retorted the book-keeper angrily, "he proved that in the affair with Wilkinson, at Leeds, in which, but for him, you would have been finely cheated. And who called our attention to the hide business in Buenos Ayres, and opened a way to enter into it? Have not our profits there been the only thing that has kept us afloat under our heavy losses?"

"But what will it all avail?" asked Berger gloomily, "if Rudolph does not leave his mother's property in our hands—"

"He won't do that, depend upon it," interrupted Hensmann.

"And C. & Co. don't forbear, we can't hold out two years longer, unless Leo makes a wealthy marriage."

"He will do so when the time of need comes. You may rely upon that," said the book-keeper confidently.

"And I tell you he won't," exclaimed Berger. "Ah, if it were Rudolph—"

"Do you know what Herr Rudolph would do if he were in Herr Leo's place?"

"Well?"

"He would marry a rich wife as soon as possible,

that the untarnished reputation of the firm might aid him; then he would request you to pay him his mother's legacy, and get as much more out of you as he could. With this capital he would establish a new business, and the firm of Berger & Son might take care of itself."

"Do you know, sir, that you are presuming to slander my son?" cried Berger in an outburst of passion.

"Did you find it an easy matter yesterday to induce him to delay the settlement with you?"

"No, indeed," replied the merchant, half sullenly and half amused, "it almost seemed as if the boy suspected something."

"Yes, your eldest son is sharp-sighted, your eldest son is sharp-sighted and crafty; it was partly natural, and partly the result of our training—unfortunately."

"Unfortunately?"

"Yes, it is now bearing its fruits; and you will live to see that they will be bitter to us. But do not let it trouble you," he added consolingly, as he noticed the air of deep dejection in his employer's manner; "your youngest son will make amends. He is like a soldier of whom I once read in a tiresome book when I was sick a few days. He would have shed the last drop of his blood rather than yield his flag; and Herr Leo will risk life and happiness rather than allow the honor of the firm to suffer a shock. One who is so faithful to a poor

deserted girl, will be loyal to his father, and his father's name. Rely upon it, sir, Berger & Son never had a better son or future chief than your youngest boy."

CHAPTER XIV.

A MEETING AND A PARTING.

Meantime Leo was slowly approaching the little village where he was to arrange the business previously mentioned. His father had intentionally given the matter much greater importance than it really deserved. Although even in the best of times, he had never been indifferent to the most trifling loss, he would merely have sent one of the older clerks to Bergefert if the affair had not afforded a plausible pretext to defer the settlement of his accounts with his eldest son a few weeks.

Leo had chosen the mode of travel, which at that time, before railways had been built and when even MacAdam's invention had not yet found its way to many parts of Germany, was most customary among merchants; a light carriage drawn by a powerful horse. The country through which his road lay was level and monotonous, but well cultivated, and occasionally diversified by avenues of elms or beeches, or a clump of trees. These groves however, were of small extent and somewhat rare; for

the inhabitants of the region were too much devoted to the products of their acres not to make the tolerably good soil as available as possible. Thus, despite the neat villages and farm-houses by which the road passed, the eye grew weary of gazing at the broad meadows, and level fields of grain, and in the absence of forests and hills, Leo would have been glad to see a patch of moorland with its juniper bushes and clumps of broom.

About noon on the second day of his journey, he drove slowly through an avenue of German poplars to the little town of Bergefort. It was surrounded with fields and meadows, and contained a few gardens scantily furnished with fruit trees. A tall, slender church spire rose into the air; on the extreme right of the outermost houses was an oval, rampart-like mound, at whose extremities still remained the ruins of low round towers, which showed that the place might once have been of considerable importance in the defense of the frontiers, and a few hundred paces from the left hand side of the road a brook plashed merrily along, under the shadow of a double row of ancient willows, to turn a mill whose clatter was the only sound, which in this sequestered spot, recalled the noisy activity of the inhabitants of manufacturing regions.

"It would be terrible to be obliged to live here," thought Leo as he drove his horse past the miserable huts which lined the main street, up to the

single inn the village possessed. I would rather spend my days on the moor; the moor? How constantly I have thought of it yesterday and to-day! But is it not always so when I am left to myself?"

There was not an inn-keeper in Bergefort; an elderly woman in a neat, simple dress appeared on the steps before the door to receive the guest. In reply to his question whether he could obtain shelter for his horse and carriage, she answered not without pride: "Oh! certainly, sir; the court stays with us every month, and we find room for the Herr Assessor, the clerk, and the messengers, and they have a carriage and two horses with them, and a coachman, too."

"Well, then, you have more than room enough for me," said Leo following her into the little parlor. "But you say the court stays with you, is there none here?"

"No, sir, Bergefort is too small; the court comes here from W. every month."

"I am sorry to hear that, for I came to transact some business with the Justizrath, whom they told me lives here."

"That is quite true, sir; he has lived here more than a year, Justizrath Greven."

"He has the title of Justizrath? How does he happen to live in this little place?"

"Ah! sir, that nobody knows. He was Justizrath of a higher court a long distance from here,

and when old Justizrath Nessler died, a year and a half ago, Herr Greven applied for the place and received it. Some say he did so because he owns a house here which he inherited from his wife, but that can scarcely be the reason; for neither he nor his wife, to whom the house was bequeathed by a great aunt, ever saw it before. Others say his niece was shy, and therefore he withdrew with her from the great city to this little place, but I don't believe that either; for nobody can be more friendly and affable than Fraulein Greven, and she is no more shy than the gentleman or I myself."

"Well, the man probably has his own reasons for preferring Bergefort to any other place," said Leo, breaking off the conversation. "Will you have the kindness to get me something to eat?"

An hour after, the hostess accompanied her guest into the street to show him the way to the Justizrath's house. Leo thanked her, and followed her directions. The narrow street through which he had to walk was scarcely a hundred paces long, and at the end the road led over the mill-stream by means of a wooden bridge, and then continued on in a tolerably straight line to the parish pastures. On the left of the path stood the house, a quaint old building, with a broad front, huge gable, and heavy slated roof. The few windows were as irregular in their position as in their forms, and the large door was only raised a single step above the gravel walk that led to it. Directly over it was a

window of moderate size in a leaden frame; the others had large bright panes, set in coarse, dark-colored wood. Before the house stood four huge lindens, near enough to afford fragrance and shade, and yet sufficiently far away to avoid diffusing dampness. On the right of the house a low iron railing surrounded a green patch of turf, in the center of which was a magnificent horse chestnut tree, now adorned with countless pyramids of blossoms; and on the left, a small, well-cultivated flower garden, also shut off from the road by an old-fashioned iron railing, extended to the bank of the brook, attracting the eyes of every passer-by to its tulips, auriculas, and fragrant clusters of lilacs.

Leo paused a moment in astonishment, as he caught sight of the old house. "Really," he thought to himself, "terrible as I should find it to be compelled to live in Bergefort, I should like to spend a short time in this mansion. It has a truly benevolent aspect, and looks at me as kindly as if it wished to offer a cordial welcome. And I would also like to sit down on the bench under the chestnut tree, and read the book which seems to have been left forgotten on yonder rustic table." Smiling at his own fancies, he walked up the gravelled path and rang the bell at the wide door.

An elderly maid-servant, very neatly dressed, opened it, but kept her hand upon it to prevent Leo's entrance. "Is Herr Justizrath Greven at home?" he asked.

“Yes—but—” a somewhat embarrassed hesitation followed.

“Perhaps he is engaged.”

“No—but—but he hasn’t finished his nap.”

“True,” thought Leo, “this is probably just the time for a siesta,” then addressing the old servant, he asked: “Could I not wait here until your master is able to see me?” for he much preferred to spend the time in the beautiful old house than at the prosaic inn.

“Why, no sir,” said the maid, “not very well; the Herr Justizrath does not like to have strangers wait in his chamber, and he is taking his nap on the sofa in the sitting-room.”

“Then, of course—” replied Leo, turning to go; but he must have found favor in the eyes of the old servant, for she drew back to allow him to enter the house, saying:

“Stay, sir; the young lady has gone out, and probably won’t object to your waiting in her room until the old gentleman wakes.” So saying, she led him through the neat hall, paved with white sandstone, upon which soft, brilliant hues were cast by the large window over the door, which as Leo now perceived was made of colored glass, and ushered him into an apartment of moderate size, whose windows looked out upon the linden trees.

There was no one in the room, but the door had scarcely closed behind the young man when he felt overwhelmed by a sudden agitation, such as is

usually excited only by meeting dear, long absent friends. How this room, which he had never seen until that moment, spoke to him, and what, oh! what did he find in it? Directly opposite, over the costly piano, hung a beautiful copper plate engraving in a brown wooden frame, a Madonna—he had once given one precisely like it, in a similar frame, to Margarethe, and the picture of the Mother of God was then the poor child's most valuable possession. But it was not only the engraving that was here; it was surrounded by a thick garland of wild daisies, the simple red and white blossoms which after a rain always grew so luxuriantly in Jost's little garden; and beneath it stood a small table with two little blue vases filled with fresh bouquets, not of the bright flowers from the garden, but the golden blossoms of the broom. Had he not given those very vases to Margarethe on her birthday, and had she not filled them with bouquets of broom every spring so long as any flowers were to be found far or near? Who was it who cherished such memories? The notes which lay open upon the piano were those of a song Leo used to sing with Margarethe, and on the little work-table by the window the book—yes, it was surely open at Voss' seventeenth birth-day, it was the "Eutonia," a collection of poems for young girls; and on the fly-leaf was her name, written in Leo's own hand. She must, she must be here! She alone could treasure and hold sacred all these insignificant ob-

jects; she alone could adorn this quiet, home-like room with mementoes which were only intelligible to her and to himself.

With increasing agitation the young man gazed around the apartment. It was simply, but very comfortably furnished, and the excellent quality of every article, from the richly gilt clock on the mantle-piece, to the thick rug under the sofa-table, showed that good taste, not parsimony, was the cause of this simplicity. Only a cultivated mind could select and arrange thus, and if Margarethe was really the occupant of this apartment the change that had taken place in her must be far greater than the hints of old Annchen of Nordhecke had led Leo to suppose.

Absorbed in these thronging thoughts and memories, he did not hear the sound of a light step on the gravel walk, the opening and closing of the outer door, the approach of some one. "Oh! God, Margarethe! Margarethe! is it really you?"

Such were the words that met the young girl as she unsuspectingly crossed the threshold of her room. She gazed in bewilderment as he rushed to meet her, caught her hands, and trembling, startled, but full of joy, looked into her pale face. Her astonishment lasted only a moment, however, the next, every doubt vanished. "Leo, dear Leo, yes it is I—and you—you?" was the faltering, happy answer.

He threw his arms around her; she leaned her

head upon his shoulder, gazing up into his face with an expression of fervent love, and both burst into tears.

After so many years of sorrow, anxiety, and almost hopeless separation, this was a moment of happiness, so pure, so deep, so overwhelming, that they did not, could not think grief or care had any farther existence for them; they could only feel the blissful certainty that they had met once more, and their affection was unaltered.

Leo at last drew back a little to obtain a better view of his new-found treasure, and whispered with a happy smile: "How tall and beautiful you have grown, Margarethe; if my heart had not helped my eyes, I believe I should hardly have known you."

She blushed, and replied with a smile, in which was mingled a shade of regret: "You have changed too, Leo; you look so stately, so strong, so resolute. Only your pleasant voice and loving eyes remain the same."

"Thereby you can see how faithful I am, faithful to you and our happy childhood; for it is in the voice and eyes that the heart speaks. And you, dearest, are you faithful too?"

Once more the blush and expression of pain appeared on the lovely face; but she answered firmly; "Yes, I am faithful, faithful to you and my unchanging devotion to you; I am happy, very happy, that I have been permitted to tell you so once

more—all the happier because I did not venture to wish or hope for it.”

“What, Margarethe, you did not wish it?”

“No, glad and thankful as I am that this short moment of happiness has been granted us, I had neither the right nor the courage to desire it.”

“But Margarethe, dearest Margarethe—”

“We must part, and the pain which we thought was already over—”

“Not I!” he vehemently interrupted. “I did not fancy it was over; I could not, for I daily felt it afresh. In the torture of having lost you, I lived solely upon the hope of finding you again. And I have found you just as the agony was increasing, and hope seemed about to fail; and now, Margarethe, you, you whom I have thought so much better, more loving, and faithful than myself, you speak of pain endured, and a fresh separation! Have I relied upon your faithful love in vain?”

“No, Leo, no; but I dare not express it as you desire; for the sake of your own happiness I must not show how unspeakably dear you are to me by a union with you, but by having the firmness to insist upon our irrevocable separation.”

“Oh! Margarethe,” he murmured, so sorrowfully that it pierced her heart; “this is not love, but cruelty.”

“Call it so, if it makes what is inevitable easier,” she answered sadly.

“But what is inevitable, and why should it be

so? Have I not returned to you unchanged? And if I was worthy of you, my beloved, before our painful separation," he added with a faint smile, "why should I be less so now, when I have been tried and found loyal?"

"The question is not, can never be of *your* unworthiness, but I—"

"You!" he exclaimed, gazing at her in rapture. "Oh! without effort of mine you have become what for years I have most ardently, most eagerly hoped to see you. You stand before me far more beautiful and winning than I ever dared to fancy in my wildest dreams. Whom am I to thank, my darling, for having found you in this perfected loveliness?"

These fond, fervent words, this unconcealed admiration, must have made her happy; for a flush of joy dyed cheek and brow. But it quickly faded, and she answered gravely, "If you allude to the smattering of education which seems to surprise you, dear Leo, I owe it, like everything else I am and have, to my kind uncle. He is really my great-uncle, for my dead mother was his niece. When he found me in my poverty and abandonment, he adopted me and cared for my education and welfare as if he had been my father; I am as happy in his house as I can ever hope to become; for he has the kindest, gentlest heart, and is very fond of me."

"It must make him very happy to be able to love and care for you," said Leo.

"He says so, and I believe him. His affectionate nature renders sympathy with others' joys a necessity, and he has no one except me. He lost his wife and two sons soon after his marriage; my unhappy mother also died young, and a little more than three years ago he followed his sister, my grandmother, to the grave. It was then that he heard of my existence and desolate situation, and adopted me."

"And you have lived with him ever since, Margarethe?"

"No, not always. I first spent a year with him, and received instruction from the best teachers in the place; then he sent me to an excellent boarding-school for two years, during which time I went to him in my vacation every Spring and Autumn. The principal of the school treated me very kindly, and I found a warm friend in one of the teachers, but, notwithstanding, I longed almost passionately for the close of my last term."

"You loved your uncle so dearly?" asked Leo, almost with a tinge of jealousy.

"I loved him dearly; how could I help it; but that was not the only, nor even the principal reason why I longed to return to his house."

"And may I know what it was, Margarethe?"

"You may, you *must* know it;" she replied, with a sudden pallor, which was instantly followed by a burning blush. "I learned at that establishment, through the carelessness of one of the older pupils

—the full extent of my mother's misfortune, and perceived the shadow that rested upon me. After that time I never breathed freely there, and when at last I returned to my uncle, the constant society found in his house became a torture. As he could not break off all relations with his old acquaintances, and deeply sympathized with my painful situation, he closed his business connections there, and retired to this secluded village. Here, my uncle, that he may not be entirely deprived of his usual occupation, attends to the legal business of the poor people, generally without payment, and I am happy in the belief that I can cheer his declining years, and aid him in fulfilling the duties of benevolence, known by no one and therefore pitied and despised by none."

"Margarethe, dear, dear Margarethe! What a word! It can never be applied to you."

She made a beseeching gesture, as if even his well meant interruption wounded her, and continued:

"It does apply to me, and there is no remedy except deep, total seclusion. I know and perceive this so plainly, that I not only understand, but approve your father's sending you to England to forget the broom-maker's foster child."

"And therefore," he said with sorrowful bitterness, "you probably also took those precautions which, after my return home, would have made it impossible for me to discover you, had not a fortunate accident come to my aid."

"I thought it was my duty, Leo," she said gently.

"Duty!" he exclaimed with increasing vehemence. "Can you call it duty to destroy forever the happiness of one who has loved you so long, so fondly, who will never cease to hold you dearer than any other living creature? Oh! Margarethe, this is a sorrowful confusion of ideas, and will bring blessings to neither of us."

"And would it bring a blessing, Leo, to solemnize our marriage without your father's consent?" she asked mournfully. "And he will not, nay, he *dare* not give it; for it is his duty to save *you* from the shadow which, as I have already told you, darkens *my* life."

"The fancy with which you torture yourself, Margarethe, is but a shadow, a phantom, which you have unhappily permitted to obtain such a hold over you, that it has darkened your mind, and obscured your usually clear understanding. What have I to do with the names, the fate of your parents. I do not know them, and will never do so if my knowledge of their lives or acts could have power to grieve you. I will only think of them as a son, in every other respect their past will be dead to me. But Margarethe, dearest Margarethe, consider that it is given into your hands to make my future a succession of days of unspeakable happiness, or convert those days into a chain of hopeless misery."

She wept bitterly, hiding her pallid face in her hands; and although firmly resolved not to yield to his passionate pleading—for she loved him more than herself, and would not sacrifice his future to what she feared would be only a short period of happiness—she found it difficult to resist the spell his entreaties exerted over her, and therefore felt an emotion of great relief when the door of her room slowly opened, and her uncle appeared on the threshold.

The old man seemed very much astonished to find the stranger of whom the old maid servant had told him, engaged in such an agitated conversation with his niece, but Margarethe's first words explained all. "Leo," said she, "this is Leo, dear uncle; he has discovered us—and alas, will not hear of a separation."

"And yet he must submit to it, my child," said the old gentleman with quiet decision, and then cordially offered his hand to Leo. "So you have sought us out, my young friend? How long is it since you returned from abroad?"

"Scarcely a week. I came home without having the faintest idea of what had happened to Margarethe during my absence. My first walk, after spending one night in my father's house, was to the moor; and how painfully I found all my hopes disappointed! My father could not, old Jost and Annchen of Nordhecke would not, give me the smallest clue to Margarethe's new relative, or place of resi-

dence. I applied to the priest and schoolmaster at B., to the postmaster in M. and D., but all in vain. They either knew nothing to tell me, or had received the strictest injunctions not to do so. It was a bitter, bitter thing to see my dearest wishes so utterly destroyed, at the very moment I thought their fulfilment was approaching."

"Then how did you succeed in discovering us, Herr Berger?" asked Greven.

"By a visible leading of Providence," replied Leo with joyous warmth. "My father unsuspectingly sent me to you on some business connected with one of the petty merchants here; and how richly the obedience with which I entered upon the tiresome journey has been rewarded."

"Would to God you had never taken it," said the Justizrath earnestly.

The young man looked at him in alarm, and asked anxiously: "Alas! are you, too against us?"

"Not against you, my dear young friend; certainly not, and if possible, still less against my beloved Margarethe. But what the child, I suspect, told you before I entered, I must support with all my authority as relative, guardian, and adopted father. Your father will never give his consent to your marriage with my neice, and highly as I treasure my darling child, proud as I am of her rare qualities, her great talents, and their unusual development, I cannot help acknowledging that he is right in his refusal; and because I grant this, I utter

an equally firm refusal against my neice's marriage with you. Margarethe fully agrees with me on this point, as well as everything else I have arranged for her present and future life; not from mistaken pride towards your father and other relatives—for as I acknowledged, your family are not wrong in their refusal to receive her among them—but from sincere, ardent love for you. Do not interrupt me, my dear friend. I know all you would and can say. But if Margarethe, which as I have already stated is not the case, had any other opinions than mine in this matter, she would still yield to me with child-like obedience; and she expects you to show the same towards your father."

This decision was final. No matter how urgently Leo pleaded and implored, no matter how many arguments he brought forward to support his most heartfelt desire, it was in vain. The Justizrath at last took him to his own room to discuss the business on which he had come to Bergefort, but could only induce him to do so by the promise that the evening should be spent in Margarethe's society, and then intentionally detained him longer than was necessary in order to give Margarethe time to compose herself. Then followed quiet, never-to-be-forgotten hours, in which grief and joy had an almost equal share.

When the time for parting drew near, the Justizrath rose, bade Leo a cordial farewell, and hastily withdrew; the lovers were alone, alone to take

their last irrevocable leave of each other. Leo made no farther effort to shake Margarethe's resolution; he knew that all entreaties were vain, and could only serve to increase the poor girl's anguish, so he clasped her closely to his heart, rained kisses on her lips and brow, and implored Heaven's blessing to rest upon her. Margarethe responded to his caresses and ardent words with equal fervor; the lovers once more gazed long and earnestly into each other's eyes—and parted.

When Leo again stood before his father to report the result of his interview with Justizrath Greven, old Berger said almost discontentedly: "You came back very soon; I thought you would spend at least five or six days on the journey."

"I settled my business with the Justizrath in less than two hours; he is as sharp-sighted as he is skillful, understands mercantile affairs with wonderful clearness, and I don't doubt manages them with equal ability. He gave me the most satisfactory assurances, and told me to say to you he hoped you would not sustain any loss worth mentioning."

"Well, well; that is much better than I thought. You see, Leo, it is always well, if possible, to speak to a lawyer yourself; then people see a man considers the matter of importance, and use greater zeal themselves. But what makes you look so? Are you ill?"

"No, father, only tired—I have seen Margarethe again."

The old man started up in terror. "There is surely the— But seen or not seen, makes no sort of difference. I advise you, young man, to drive these crazy ideas out of your head, once for all, or you lose your father's love and blessing forever."

"Do not be alarmed, father—Margarethe will never be your daughter-in-law."

"Ah! so you have come to your senses at last; God knows, I am glad to hear it; yes, now you probably see for yourself that a pretty face without education or refinement, is not enough to make a man in your position happy."

"You are mistaken there, father, Margarethe is all and more than all, the most fastidious taste could desire in the choice of a wife. Her great beauty, rare talents, and careful education would secure the cordial admiration of any circle of society, even were these advantages not enhanced by the possession of great wealth. No, father, if I ever loved Margarethe, she is now far dearer than ever."

"So you see that—"

A quiet gesture, and a firm, almost haughty glance from Leo, repressed the words already hovering on his lips, and his son continued: "I should esteem it an honor in every respect to be permitted to call a creature so noble, so richly gifted as Margarethe, my wife. I most ardently, urgently implored her guardian and herself for her hand, and was resolutely rejected by both at once and forever."

The deep sorrow in the tone with which these words were uttered touched his father's heart, yet he was inexpressibly glad that this unfortunate freak of his noble boy's seemed to be now, once for all, at an end. "I am glad, heartily glad!" he said, rubbing his hands. "But," he added angrily, "the girl and her guardian must be crazy, perfectly crazy, to reject such an offer."

"You are mistaken in that supposition too, father," said Leo, not without a tinge of bitterness, "Margarethe's uncle and guardian is Justizrath Greven. He is enormously rich, and she is his sole heiress, so she is more than my equal. Both, however, know that Margarethe, necessary as she is to my happiness, would always be an unwelcome daughter-in-law to you; and if we have our pride, they cherish their modest, yet unchangeable sense of honor. But I implore you, father, let these be the last words we ever exchange upon a subject so infinitely painful to me."

An hour after, Hensmann, the book-keeper, stood before his employer in his private office, and said somewhat sullenly; "So Herr Leo is back already?"

"Unfortunately," replied Berger with a heavy sigh; "and we shall now be obliged to pay Rudolph's demand the first of next month."

"Try to obtain three months extension from him; he is your son, and will keep counsel for his own sake."

"I will try—but—you know Rudolph; I greatly

doubt whether he will sacrifice his interests to mine, especially as I cannot be perfectly frank with him in regard to my real situation."

"Well, that would certainly be the least likely way to induce him to forbear," said Hensmann. "If he should suspect the least danger to his *own* property, he would secure it though he ruined ten fathers."

"You ought to be ashamed to speak so of my son, Hensmann," replied Berger angrily.

"I cannot speak of him otherwise than as he is. You, yourself, said, only a moment ago, that I knew him. But let the Herr Principal try it; if he doesn't succeed then—"

"Then?"

"Well, then, within three months, Herr Leo must be engaged, if not married, to some wealthy merchant's daughter, in order to give new support to our credit."

"That will be a difficult matter, after what he has just suffered, which seems to cause him such incomprehensible sorrow," muttered the merchant. "But you are right, Hensmann," he continued rousing himself, "we must have help from Leo, and if he does not yield willingly—we can instantly give him reasons why he must."

CHAPTER XV.

A FEW WORDS OF EXPLANATION.

While Margarethe's destiny thus seemed to have been finally decided, and she thought she had broken off all connections with the world by her agonizing parting from the beloved friend of her youth, she did not in the least suspect that her mere existence would exert a great influence over persons, who were as yet total strangers to her—yet this was the case to a very great degree. Ever since the evening when her grandfather—now long dead—of whose existence she had scarcely ever heard a word, appeared in her father's castle, an anxious longing for Helene's forsaken child, or at least for some certainty about her life or death, had arisen in that father's heart. His relation towards her mother had not been the mere fancy of an aristocratic man for a daughter of the people, to pass away an idle hour, or gratify a sensual wish. No, Helene had been his equal, nay, his superior in intellect and education; her manner and habits of life were not very different from those of the ladies

of his own rank, and as he did not meet her in *his*, but in her own social circles, and indeed, as one of the most distinguished ladies among those who surrounded her, she had met him on perfectly equal terms during the whole period of their acquaintance. Besides this, she was the object of the only true love which had ever ruled his heart; and the design of raising her to the rank of his wife, which for a long time he had really cherished, was, and remained the only ebullition of will that had ever marked his indolent, irresolute existence. True, his father's stronger will had conquered this resolution, true, his beloved was at last sacrificed, and then shamefully deserted; but he had, from the first moment, wooed her ardently and sincerely, and for a long time called her his betrothed, not only to her mother and herself, but in his own mind, and his relations towards Helene, and duties towards her child, still appeared to him illumined by the light of these memories. However often he might say to himself that the wealth of Helene's relatives would secure her daughter from all possibility of want, he was always tortured by the never sleeping consciousness that it was *his* duty to provide for her, and a consuming desire to discharge this undeniable claim.

But he did not venture to make any effort to obtain any certain information in regard to the existence of this forsaken child; for he was unwilling to still farther compromise the peace of his married

life, already so bitterly disturbed, and thus his days were continually embittered by the torture of deep, unavailing remorse, and petty, galling disputes. Not for a single moment could he enjoy the material prosperity and comfort, for which he had sacrificed everything.

The Countess, although destitute of any warm feelings for her husband, and perfectly convinced from the beginning that he had been induced to offer her his hand from very different motives than esteem or affection, had nevertheless been a prey to secret jealousy from the hour of her marriage. Like many selfish people, she was incapable of love; but perhaps in consequence of her egotistical qualities, required from those she considered her own, the tribute of love to herself. She wished to possess her husband and children, and to enjoy this possession, and therefore, without ever displaying anything but coldness or indifference, desired from them increasing attention and respect for herself and her wishes. As her husband, out of love of ease, had tolerably satisfied these demands, and her children, partly from their natural relations towards their mother, and partly from fear of her cold severity, always behaved dutifully towards her, a passably good understanding had prevailed at Castle Miltenberg up to the day of Lorsberg's appearance. The angry, embittered man had fully attained his object by his short, unfriendly visit. True, his duel with the Count had resulted disastrously for him, but all the happiness the Count

and his wife had formerly possessed was from that hour irretrievably lost.

From that moment the Countess had not only suffered a change for the worse to enter into her relations with her husband, but she had never been the same towards her eldest daughter. Before this time, few as were the points of contact between her narrow mind and this gifted creature, she had loved the child, so far as was possible to one of her nature. Pride in her daughter's charms was doubtless the principal cause of her maternal affection; but since this pride had been so bitterly humiliated by Lorsberg's insulting words, her former love for Louise became transformed into almost positive aversion. If she could have conquered this change, and showed her innocent child the warm motherly feelings she so well deserved, she would undoubtedly have retained her daughter's sincere love and devotion. Clever and just as Louise was, she would have looked upon her mother as the injured person, her father as the insulter of her most sacred rights, and taken her part at once and forever. But now nothing in that dark, mysterious incident stood forth so clearly as her mother's harshness and want of love, and her father's unhappiness; and with the firm conviction that she was not only unnecessary, but positively disagreeable to the former, while the latter cherished her as his beloved and only comfort, she turned resolutely away from her mother to cling to her father's side.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARRIAGE SCHEMES.

The Countess was sitting in her own room at Miltenberg, reading with eager interest a letter from her cousin, Baroness von Dornick. In order to make ourselves acquainted with the contents, and at the same time to learn whether the Baroness still resembles the portrait sketched during a former visit at the castle, we will also peruse the sheet. The epistle ran as follows :

“DEAR COUSIN :—If it were not so utterly unpractical to regret anything which is perfectly satisfactory in itself, besides being irrevocably settled, I should now most earnestly lament that Cecilia is already married. Within a short time, a *parti* has appeared in our circle, whom I would far rather have seen my daughter’s husband than my present son-in-law, although Clemens Almersback is a very good man in his way, of spotless lineage, and very well off as regards property. But better is better, and Count Otto von Guntersberg, with his boundless wealth, princely possessions, and influential connections, is a very different person

from plain Baron Almersbach, and Dornick says so too. However, Cecilia is married, and there is nothing more to be done about the matter, so as my daughter's interests are entirely out of the question, I thought of yours. If the Count cannot become my son-in-law, I would rather see him marry into a family nearly related to mine than have him enter a stranger's.

“Still, there are serious difficulties in the affair, not only in consequence of outside obstacles, but on account of the Count's own peculiarities. You perhaps know that he lost both parents when very young, and on the day he came of age, entered into the uncontrolled possession of his immense property. It was natural that he should rush into the whirlpool of fashionable life, and thus it happened that he exhausted—not his wealth, for it is so immense that even the wildest extravagance could scarcely ruin him—but himself, or rather his pleasure in life, his capacity for enjoyment. People give this condition a name which I don't remember having heard in my youth, perhaps because the calamitous times did not allow men leisure to be *blasé*. There are many such cases now, but I never saw any one so utterly *blasé* as the Count. Besides this, a young man of such wealth and rank, united to a very handsome person, would be welcome to any mother for her daughter, so numberless young ladies have been introduced to him in the most delicate and indelicate manner, whom he can have no difficulty in perceiving were intended for him, with or without their knowledge and consent. This has made him so fastidious, and—so far as this matter is concerned—so suspicious, that he can no longer be induced to interest himself in any lady, let alone making a choice, and almost despairs of the possibility of coming to any decision.

“The Count, as perhaps you may be aware, dear Therese, is distantly related to Dornick. For this reason, as we supposed, he attached himself closely to us soon after his arrival in W., but with his usual frankness, he confessed that the circumstance of our having no daughter to marry, had attracted him far more than the relationship, which is really very distant. I laughingly told him that in spite of that I had designs upon him, and spoke very frankly of your Louise; for I rightly judged one would succeed better with him by the greatest candor than by the most refined delicacy. He gaily entered into my pretended jest, but I saw he perceived I had a serious meaning, and also that the matter gave him food for thought.

“He did not allude to the incident for a long time, and I observed a similar silence, especially as I learned he was trying to obtain farther particulars of Louise from others. That they quickly guessed the cause of his curiosity, and eagerly strove to stifle all desire to see the young girl, you may readily suppose, but these very efforts had a contrary result. The frightful pictures of Louise’s pride, coldness, and self-assurance, which every lady tried to draw, while the men—you must pardon my frankness—all more or less wounded by these traits in your daughter’s character, could not help acknowledging their truth, though they praised her grace and beauty, roused the most eager expectations in his mind, and he finally condescended to entreat me to obtain an introduction to you. His request that I should induce you to bring your daughter here that he might meet her at the few balls which will be given before the close of the season, I rejected as inadmissible, and told him I had no reasonable pretext for doing so, since you

had left W. with your family only a few weeks before, and if I should write openly that I wished you to bring Louise here because a young gentleman, who was anxious to make her acquaintance, had begged me to procure him an introduction, you would never consent. Thus a point was reached where he must either let the matter drop, or take a more decided course. He did the latter. He asked whether it would be possible for me to take him to Miltenberg, and I told him nothing could be easier, for Dornick and I had promised to spend a few weeks with you and Steinthal at the close of the Carnival, and without exciting any particular attention, could request your permission to bring a relative who was visiting us in W., and wished to remain with us still longer. The Count agreed to my proposal without the least hesitation, and now to obtain this brilliant match for Louise you have only to give me permission to introduce this *grand parti*. It is evident he has determined to give up his bachelor life as soon as he finds a wife who meets his wishes; and I am perfectly sure Louise will satisfy him in every respect.

"I never wrote so long a letter in all my life, therefore you must pardon me if I conclude as quickly as possible. Dornick, my children, and I are well and happy, and hope you are the same. My family send kind regards to you and Steinthal, and I beg you to tell me when you can receive us. Don't defer it too long; for the Count is impatient. Give my love to Louise also, and be assured of the faithful friendship

"Of your cousin,

"MINNA DORNICK.

"W., March 10th, 183-."

The Countess read this letter twice; the first

time hastily and eagerly, the second, slowly and thoughtfully, sometimes letting her hand fall, and gazing earnestly and immovably before her. When she had finished the second reading, she nodded as if very well satisfied, went to her writing-table, laid the letter down, and for a moment stood still thoughtfully, once even turning as if to leave the room; but the impulse passed as quickly as it came, she instantly sat down to write, and without farther hesitation or reflection dashed off the following lines:

“MY DEAR MINNA:—I am doubly grateful to you for the proof of friendly interest afforded by your letter of March 10th; for I am aware that so long and ample an epistle is a sacrifice you would scarcely make for any one whom you did not highly esteem. I know, if possible, you are even less fond of writing than reading. Your well-meant wishes and efforts in my daughter’s behalf, also deserve the warmest thanks. It would ill beseem me if I did not frankly tell you that the alliance you hope to make for my daughter seems a very suitable one; but whether our wishes in regard to it will be fulfilled, is very uncertain. From your description, Count von Guntersberg is a man who claims every consideration—as he is justified in doing on account of his wealth and rank—but he is not accustomed to think of the same thing in regard to others. My daughter is equally exacting, nay, I must confess, full of caprices. Neither her own good sense, nor all the toil I have lavished upon her education, have availed to extirpate a trait of character so undesirable in a young lady. How the Count and Louise are mutually to attract each other, since all

wise people say this takes place only between opposite qualities, and still more how they will ever come to an understanding, I do not see. Still, the matter is one of so much consequence to my daughter that this time, contrary to my own opinions, I will allow myself to be guided by my wishes instead of my judgment; therefore, I beg you and your husband, dear cousin, not only to keep your promise, and give us the pleasure of your company as soon as possible, but to bring Count von Guntersburg with you. The rest must then take care of itself; it can only be left to time and the two young people.

"I shall expect you and your companions a week from to-day. If your son's lessons will permit you to bring Max and Ferdinand with you, their cousins Fritz and Ulrich will be very grateful. You know Miltenberg is large enough to accommodate a far greater number of guests.

"I shall now only add Steinthal's and Louise's regards to Dornick and dear Cecilia, and beg you to write a few lines to inform me whether we may hope your boys will accompany you. *Au revoir*, and until we meet believe me,

"Your affectionate cousin,

"THERESE VON STEINTHAL.

"Miltenberg, March 18th, 183-."

When the Countess had finished her letter, she rang the bell and ordered the servant to request her husband to give her a few minutes in her own room. Courteous as was the form of this request, she knew that like all her words it would have the force of a command, and a few moments after, the Count appeared before his stern mistress. "I have received a letter from Minna von Dornick," she

began, "and wish to make you acquainted with its contents and my reply."

"You are evidently taking unnecessary trouble," replied the Count rudely. "If I am not mistaken, the answer is already written."

"The Countess, without taking any notice of the real purport of his remark, replied with studied coldness: "Everything is distasteful to you which bears the most distant resemblance to business. It is incomprehensible to me how a human being—a man—can be so incredibly indolent. Pray do not interrupt me: you can not change my opinion by words; this time, however, you will probably be forced to give me your attention, for the matter in question concerns Louise's future."

"Louise's future?" asked the Count in astonishment, suddenly starting from the chair into which he had sunk in an almost reclining posture.

"Does that surprise you—she is more than nineteen, and it is quite time to attend to arranging a marriage for her, especially as her pretty face is her only dowry."

"Her beauty," replied the Count with visible pride, "is not of a style that one need fear will fade early."

"Perhaps not," said the Countess carelessly. "I don't understand such things, but I am certain that a beauty can scarcely appear two successive seasons without being out of fashion, which is quite as fading."

"Possibly. But what does your cousin write?"

"Count Otto von Guntersburg—"

"What—the Count from B?" he interrupted.

"Yes—but read the letter yourself; for one can not discuss any business matter with you. You interrupt me at almost every sentence."

She held out the letter with an air of displeasure, while he asked reproachfully: "Do you call Louise's marriage a business matter?"

"Why, what else should it be?" she answered carelessly, leaning back in her chair, and busying herself in setting the watch she wore in her belt by the clock that stood on her writing-table.

The Count read Baroness von Dornick's letter twice, as his wife had done, but with a very different, far warmer interest. At last he folded and returned it, saying: "Would to God Louise might feel an affection for him."

"Ah! that is the least important part of the affair," replied the Countess contemptuously.

"The least important?" asked the Count in surprise. "But Therese, what else can have any connection with the matter?"

"Simply whether the Count takes a fancy to your daughter, my precious simpleton. He is free to offer his hand or not according to his own pleasure, *she* has merely to wait to ascertain whether she suits his taste; and in the former case, as a matter of course, she will become his wife."

"But Therese—suppose he does not please her?"

“Why then—to be sure—such Counts don’t grow by the road-side like sloes. See, here is the reply I have written to my cousin.”

“You ought not to have spoken of your daughter in such a way,” said the Count peevishly, as he returned the letter.

“Why not?” she asked sharply. “Did I not write the exact truth. And do you suppose Minna does not know our Louise thoroughly? To conceal the faults of one’s children very rarely succeeds, it is much more sensible to try to correct them; but your blind partiality for Louise has rendered it impossible for me to do so.”

“Louise is better, far better than you represent her,” replied the Count; “but let that pass. I should care very little about it if I were certain your letter would be read only by your cousin. But unfortunately, I am by no means sure of her discretion.”

“She is very prudent; but it is possible, in the present case, that she may think proper to show my letter to the Count.”

“If you believe that possible,” cried the Count with an outburst of indignation, “I do not understand how you could have made use of such expressions in regard to your daughter. Every mother who had any feeling for her child—”

“Oh, feeling!” interrupted the Countess, with a scornful intonation, and a repellant gesture which silenced her husband. “Feeling! there is nothing

in the world more useless. Every woman of sense and experience, who wished to secure this brilliant match for her daughter would have written exactly as I did. Count Guntersburg is *blase*, wearied, as Minna says. To such men, gentle well-trained girls seem insipid, while on the contrary the sketch I have drawn of Louise will appear piquant, and from what I know of her, she will take care not to fall below my description."

The Count perceived it would be a useless effort for him to oppose his wife's sending this letter to the Baroness von Dornick, or even to urge any alteration in its contents. He therefore made another attempt to assert his authority as head of the family, as well as to satisfy his paternal affection, by protesting with angry vehemence that he would never permit his daughter to be forced or cajoled into a distasteful marriage."

"You are overshooting the mark again," said the Countess with insulting coldness, as she sealed her letter. "How do you know that Louise will not joyfully seize the good fortune so unexpectedly offered? Whatever her faults may be—and she has many, thanks to the resemblance between her character and yours, and your absurd indulgence—she lacks neither sense nor ambition. Let things quietly take their course, before you begin to rage so aimlessly. The Count may have seen very different beauties from this image of your— But we will

close this discussion, and order Anton to saddle a horse and take my letter to the post-office."

The Count repeated the order, and this at least for the present, was the sole result of the confidential interview between him and his wife.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN INSULT AND ITS REBUFF.

The expected guests had reached Miltenberg, and life at the castle was as gay and animated as the Countess' cold, stern presence, and her husband's somewhat gloomy disposition ever permitted it to be. Baroness von Dornick had brought her young sons with her, their tutor having proposed to employ the time of their stay in Miltenberg in a holiday trip, and the two younger children were left at home with their governess. This arrangement enabled her to manage her household in the plainest manner during the time of her absence from W.; and the pleasure she felt in the attainment of this practical minor object of her visit to Therese, had no little share in heightening her usual happy frame of mind. Baron von Dornick, who liked any change, was glad to be in the country once more, and seemed as gay as his wife. As for his sons, the mere fact that they need keep no regular study hours, but could roam at pleasure with their cousins through the fields and forests was quite sufficient to make them happy.

Thus to all appearance the whole company were pleasantly situated, except the two persons who had been the real cause of this somewhat premature *villegiatura* of the von Dornick family; Count Otto von Guntersberg, as usual, dragged the whole burden of his unconquerable leaden *ennui* after him, and in addition to this he felt almost equally tortured by another extremely disagreeable feeling: the consciousness that he was once more appearing in the character of a suitor, and this time it was highly probable it would be in vain. True, the unlucky candidate for matrimonial honors had never yet been rejected; he himself had always been the one to withdraw before he reached the irrevocable point, either because he thought he discovered qualities in the lady which might endanger his future happiness, or because he learned that she had connections or relatives who might prove troublesome, or, and this was most frequently the case, because his overtures were too eagerly met. This so deeply wounded the fastidious taste of the much sought young man, that he frequently fled from a nearly concluded betrothal as if it were some impending danger. He had almost resigned himself to the belief that he should soon be obliged to decide upon some alliance, when the lively and yet peculiarly shrewd manner in which Baroness von Dornick had spoken of Countess Steinthal as a suitable bride, pleasantly excited him. All that he heard of Louise elsewhere, increased his curiosity,

and he eagerly assented to the Baroness' proposal that he should accompany them to Miltenberg. But on the way thither, he already regretted his readiness, and in consequence became so bored, so sulky, that the Baron told his wife, unless the Count behaved very differently at Miltenberg, he would forgive Louise if, spite of his rank and wealth, she treated him with all her customary arrogance.

Count and Countess Steinthal both possessed the quiet, composed manners, and ready tact, which the consciousness of an indisputably lofty position, united to the custom of moving in good society, easily bestows. They therefore received Count Guntersburg with no greater marks of distinction than would be due to any honored guest, brought to their house by their relatives. No change was obvious either in their household arrangements, or family life, and everything appeared as if, notwithstanding the cordiality with which they welcomed their guests, they did not intend to allow their own comfortable mode of life to be disturbed, and considered the elegant, nay, even lavish manner, in which the household was conducted, rendered it unnecessary for them to make any special exertions for strangers, even though they might be of high rank. In one respect, Count Otto found it agreeable to be treated in this manner; for he felt that thus all allusion to the real object of his visit was avoided, and he was left perfectly free to act his pleasure, and with his aversion to any allurements

towards the step which, nevertheless, he was anxious to take, this treatment made him easier and more unconstrained at Miltenberg than he had ever been in any similar situation. On the other hand, however, he had always been accustomed to find himself specially distinguished, and though naturally neither arrogant nor exacting, this habit had imperceptibly led him to the belief that he was entitled to this distinction; and hitherto he had always unconsciously claimed and received it. Now, for the first time in his life, it did not appear to fall to his lot in the degree he thought himself entitled to demand. At the same moment he made this discovery he became conscious of the indignation it excited to see himself less highly esteemed than, in his own opinion, he considered his due, and this failure to satisfy his—according to his own ideas—perfectly just claims, produced the same results which are generally seen to proceed from arrogance and self-conceit. He showed an indifference and want of consideration that formed a striking contrast to the quiet, courteous demeanor of his host and hostess; and intentionally displayed the true object of his visit, which they studiously sought to ignore. It seemed as if he wished to convey in the plainest possible manner, that he had come to Miltenberg in search of a wife, and while utterly careless as to the result of his observations, intended to conduct them without reserve, and with the greatest ease to himself.

Louise also knew why Count Guntersburg had

come to her parents' castle. Her mother, without the slightest pity for the young girl's delicacy of feeling, and placing very little value upon the ease of manner which she was so carelessly destroying, told her all, that she might give her daughter the instructions concerning her conduct she considered necessary. Louise listened to her in silence, apparently unmoved; only the frequent change of color in her beautiful face betrayed her secret agitation, and when the Countess at last impatiently urged her daughter for her opinion in regard to the matter, the latter quietly replied: "It would of course be no small thing to become the partner of such rank and wealth; but we do not yet know whether I shall please the Count. Let us wait till that is decided, mamma." Thus she did not refuse, but at the same time made no positive promise. The Countess, however, interpreted the remark agreeably to her own wishes, and hoped Louise's cleverness and ambition would advance her plans.

Count Steinthal also had a conversation with his daughter about this event. He told her that it would make him happy to see her in a position so worthy of her birth and personal qualities, and thought this desirable event would greatly conduce to her mother's happiness, and thereby secure to himself a more peaceful future; yet he did not speak of the acceptance of Count Otto's proposal as being absolutely necessary, but told her he would never suffer any force to be placed upon her affections. Louise knew his weakness, when

opposed to the Countess, and foresaw that he would not be able to protect her; but she was touched by his fatherly care and sympathy, and secretly vowed to show her gratitude as far as she was able.

Count Steinthal's family had not yet adapted themselves to the French or English custom of dining at an hour, at which it would be more appropriate to call the meal supper; and still had dinner served at two o'clock in the afternoon. Thus during the gloomy season of the year, with its early twilights, the hours before dinner were sufficiently long to attend to any business matters, and afford an opportunity to pay visits and make excursions in the neighborhood; while in the long days there was plenty of time to take longer walks, drive, ride, and receive calls between dinner and supper, which was served at nine o'clock; but at all seasons of the year everybody, who was at home, assembled in the same room at the Countess' tea hour.

Thus we find the family and guests collected in the large drawing-room, already mentioned at the time of Count Ulrich's funeral. Night has not yet wholly fallen, but in spite of the large windows the spacious apartment would already be dark—for the deep alcoves with their heavy velvet curtains render it difficult for the light to enter—had not the chandeliers been lighted, and candles placed on the different tables. At one of these sat the young Counts Steinthal and their cousins, engaged in games of chess and dominoes; while another surrounded with sofas and chairs was occupied by

Count von Steinthal, Baron von Dornick, their wives, and Countess Louise. Count von Guntersburg walked slowly to and fro between this group and the open door of an adjoining room, apparently listening to an overture the younger Countess and her governess were playing on the piano, with more skill than taste.

"Theresette plays finely," observed the Baroness, "she is as far advanced as you were at her age, Louise, though she does not possess your talent. It must be confessed that Fraulein Falk understands teaching thoroughly."

"Do you think so, aunt Minna?" asked Louise carelessly.

"Certainly, my dear child. We all know Theresette is not nearly so clever as you are; how else could she make the same progress that you did at her age?"

"Perhaps," replied Louise in the same indifferent tone as before, "Theresette is entitled to more credit than Fraulein Falk."

"It is very charming in you to take your sister's part, dear Louise; and I agree with you if you think people like Fraulein Falk ought not to be over-praised. But one may be allowed to express an opinion behind her back, especially as the fact is, that—"

"That Theresette is industrious and persevering, while I was lazy and superficial, dear aunt," interposed Louise quietly, with such a winning smile that the Baroness could not be vexed at the interrup-

tion. "I certainly do not wish to detract from the good-will and faithfulness Fraulein Falk devotes to her hours of instruction; but believe me, dear aunt, to my little sister's talent and perseverance is due the largest share of praise."

"You are very fortunate in your children, Therese," said the Baroness. "Mine are always obliged to be driven to study."

"As for that, with the exception of Theresettchen, I fare no better. The boys are almost as averse to labor as Louise."

"Well, it wasn't necessary for her to exert herself much," said the Baron, "she has learned quite enough. Isn't that so, Loulou?"

"Yes, uncle," replied the Countess with the same careless courtesy, "I can jingle the piano, embroider, crochet, read novels, and—which is perhaps my only useful accomplishment—make tea."

With these words she seated herself behind the dainty Sevres cups to pour out the fragrant beverage; and she did so in such a pleasant, graceful manner that Count Otto involuntarily paused in his walk to observe the charming Hebe more closely.

"You slander yourself, my child," said Count Steinthal as his daughter passed the cups, "I cannot be ill so often without knowing what a kind gentle nurse you are, and how frequently you act as my private secretary."

"Oh! papa, how can you mention such commonplace occupations in good society?" asked Louise jestingly, but in a far warmer tone than she had

formerly used. "You are praising me for the qualities of a *soeur grise*, or a clerk."

Meantime Count Guntersburg had approached the table, thrown himself into a chair at Louise's side, rested one arm on its high back, and closed one eye while with the other he looked at the Countess through his hand, which was doubled in the shape of a tube, as coolly and unconcernedly as people gaze at a work of art in a picture gallery, or similar place of resort. Louise saw it, and a dark angry flush rose to her brow, covering her beautiful neck and snowy throat; and she thus remained motionless at the table, holding the silver waiter in her hand. An embarrassed silence followed. Spite of the Countess's usual tact, no more skillful mode of breaking the pause occurred to her, than the awkward question: "Louise, why do you not offer the Count some tea?"

"The Count," replied Louise in a firm tone—but the effort it cost her to speak calmly was so great that she herself felt the deathlike pallor that followed the deep flush—"the Count is now occupied, mamma, in making studies of the changes of color in my face, and I thought, as your guest, I owed him sufficient respect not to interrupt his scientific investigations."

This reply, spite of its justice, would only have increased the painfulness of the situation, had not the Count, notwithstanding his faults, possessed a very kind heart. He saw that the Countess had reason to feel insulted, and her courage in openly asserting

her right to an atonement, not only to him, but in her parents' presence, forced upon him the conviction that he had to deal with a frank, truthful character. This knowledge instantly produced a high esteem for the Countess, and an equally sincere regret for having offended her. Wholly unaccustomed to place any constraint upon himself, he did not hesitate to express his feelings, and try to soothe Louise's well-founded indignation. "Forgive me, Countess," he said imploringly, "for I need your pardon, although I do not deserve it. Yet there is some little excuse for me, and you are not wholly free from blame yourself, gracious Countess. Why are you so beautiful that we forget everything else, and so cold that you resemble a marble statue rather than a living, sensitive human being? But I will not seek to lessen my crime in your eyes; it is so great that I feel I dare hope for pardon only from your generosity."

While he was speaking, Louise had regained her usual composure, and looking at the Count without the slightest agitation, replied with perfect calmness: "You are less to blame, Count Guntersburg, than the society which spoiled you until you believed everything was at your service, and you had a right to gratify every caprice. You have seen that I do not share this opinion; permit me now to assure you that you are not of sufficient consequence to affect me unpleasantly more than a moment. Ulrich, have you finished your game? Very well then, come here and get your biscuits. Ferdinand

can take the tea-cups ; he is more careful than the others, and won't spill anything."

The boys came up to the large table to get their little lunch, which Louise gave them with her usual quiet kindness. No greater vivacity, more eager gayety, or unusual attention to anything or person, revealed how deeply moved she really was. She would have died rather than betray her agitation, and she firmly maintained the mask of calm indifference, until, at a late hour, she entered her own room.

Her steadfast composure had restored the others to their usual equanimity ; Count Guntersburg was the only person who did not seem like himself. He probably understood that there was more contempt than forgiveness in the Countess' reply, but he admired her pride and frankness. He perceived that she had an independent will, as well as judgment, and that unless he could win both to his side, it would be impossible for him to obtain her hand, even though her parents should use the most loving persuasions, or pitiless compulsion. Thus if his choice fell upon Louise, there would be a necessity to woo her in earnest, and also the possibility of a rejection. Thoughts such as : "You must really exert yourself if you wish to win her favor ;" questions like : "Suppose she should not care for me ? Is it possible that she would refuse my hand ?" arose in his mind for the first time, and seemed amusing from their very novelty. True, there was something in such thoughts and questions

which humiliated his pride, irritated his self-love; but even this irritation, it seemed to him, was better than the death-like *ennui* whose helpless prey he had been so long. He felt an interest in something, and rousing himself from his apathy, once more had an eager emotion, a real desire, a true genuine anxiety. These doubtful possessions, which the majority of men would consider a great misfortune, put the Count in such a pleasant humor that during the remainder of the evening, he joined in the conversation with unusual vivacity and animation. Every one, except Louise, thought this merriment was assumed to conceal the annoyance and anger caused by the Countess' reproof; Louise, however, was too keen sighted not to perceive that his gayety was real, and as she could not discover its true source, looked upon it as a fresh insult, and fancied he took delight in having annoyed her, and would not trouble himself to conceal his satisfaction.

On entering her room, she dismissed her maid for the night. As soon as the girl had left the apartment, the Countess gazed hastily and sharply around the chamber, as if to convince herself that she was quite alone, threw herself into the nearest chair, and burst into violent, convulsive sobs. Even now, when Nature so imperiously asserted her rights, the young girl maintained a portion of the self-control by which she had completely deceived those who had surrounded her. Passionately as her tears flowed, she wept almost inaudibly, and al-

though her whole frame trembled with the violence of her suppressed sobs, not a limb moved. If her pride enabled her to maintain perfect composure, under all circumstances, while in the presence of others, her self esteem taught her to keep her emotion within bounds, even when entirely alone and deeply agitated.

Still she was far too much engrossed in her own feelings to heed any sound from without, and thus she failed to hear a low knock at her door, the noise of its opening, or the soft tread with which her mother moving slowly over the carpeted floor, approached her. The Countess paused before her daughter, measured her from head to foot with a cold, scornful glance, and then called her by name, in a harsh, stern tone. Louise started and looked up; she did not rise, but her tears ceased to flow, and she asked in a perfectly calm voice: "Did you want anything, mamma?"

The Countess answered by another question: "Why are you weeping?"

"Do you not know, mother?" replied Louise in a choking voice.

"Of course I know, you unreasonable creature!" was the answer; "over the loss of a brilliant future, which you have destroyed."

"Certainly not, mamma; if you think so, you know very little of my wishes and feelings."

"Of course I think so; what other cause should you have for tears?"

"What other cause?" asked the Countess, now

rising with sudden vehemence, and standing haughtily erect before her mother. "Do you ask me that, you, my mother? I have been disgraced before your eyes, at your side, and you ask the cause of my grief, my anger?"

"Disgraced? What disgraced you, except your own violence?" said the Countess coldly.

"My violence! Now, yes, now I am violent; for my blood boils to see you intentionally overlook the insult offered to me; but did you hear even *one* excited tone from me in the drawing-room?"

"No, but your voice had a cutting coldness more offensive than the greatest violence, and the Count—"

"Oh! this Count," interrupted Louise, "this Count—is a man permitted to adopt such manners towards a spotless lady, merely because he is the worthless heir of great wealth? This to me—to me—in my father's house! If he had treated my poor waiting-maid so, in her father's and brother's presence, he would have received a fitting punishment; but who protects, who avenges me, unless I do so myself, with the pitiful weapons which are at a woman's command?"

"Pitiful, indeed! Your whole conduct is pitiful. What young lady of good sense and education would have behaved as you have done towards a man like Count Guntersburg?"

"Every one, mamma, every one, who in addition to the usual calculating upon future advantage which unfortunately lies so near the hearts of

us poor aristocratic girls from our very cradles, had still preserved the smallest remnant of womanly feeling, womanly dignity ! Am I a picture exposed for sale ? an actress whose play of expression every spectator may freely criticize, because he has paid to do so ? This to me, before my mother's eyes, at my father's table ! To feel that this man sits beside me, noting with his bold eyes the changes of color in my face, the throbbing or fluttering of my pulses, not to draw therefrom some omen for his happiness, his hopes, but to decide whether the object offered him is really worth accepting with a tolerable amount of graciousness."

"What wild mad words are these ?" said the Countess with cold contempt. "You are your father's own daughter, fantastic, passionate, and uncontrolled like him, and like him incapable, even to secure your own happiness, of maintaining your position without aid from others."

"Uncontrolled—I ? That accusation is too groundless for me to take the trouble to contradict it, mamma. And oh !—my father—your character is defamed to degrade your daughter. I love him far more in his dreamy sadness, than you with your energy, so reckless of others. But I will show you that I have sufficient firmness in my nature to make myself independent of you, and punish the insolence of this *grand seigneur*."

Little as Louise loved her mother, never until this hour had she failed in the respect which was her due ; for she was faithful to her duties, as far

as her deficient education had taught her to recognize them; but to-day the Countess' assault upon her father's character, and her unwomanly indifference to Guntersburg's insulting conduct, had deeply wounded her daughter's affectionate and maidenly feelings, and thus occasioned the improper tone Louise adopted towards her. Her astonishment was equal to her indignation, and she replied with insulting severity: "Undutiful creature, do you speak so to your mother? Does it not prove that you are just what I described you, you spoiled child of a foolish father? You will make yourself independent? May you soon, very soon succeed in doing so, and in a way which will rid me of you."

"May it be so," replied Louise with equal sternness, as her mother looked at her scornfully with an expression of almost positive hatred, and left the room.

The Countess gazed after her retreating figure till the door closed behind her, then returned to her seat with a slow, measured step, and leaning her burning cheek upon her hand, remained motionless for a long time, absorbed in deep earnest meditation. When she at last rose, the candles burning low in their sockets, but dimly lighted the large old-fashioned chamber; the moon, almost ready to set, cast livid, bluish rays upon the dark wainscoting, and shed a cold mysterious gleam upon the tarnished gilt frames of some old family pictures on the walls; a cold dusky twilight hovered around

the dark tapestry and curtains; Louise's pallid face was also cold and gloomy, but resolution and firmness were clearly expressed in it, as distinctly as a human countenance could reveal the feelings of the soul.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONTRASTING CHARACTERS.

Old Herr Berger, his two sons, and his faithful book-keeper were assembled in the private office. The merchant sat at his writing-table, which was covered with books and papers; selecting a paper from the pile, he handed it to his sons.

"This is the inventory of your mother's legacy, legally made out and certified," said he, "you can examine it, and will find that I have to pay each of you the sum of 26,167 thalers, 20 groschens and 3 pennies, including the interest I owe you, from the time Leo attained his majority until to-day, as you will see by my book-keeper's enclosed calculation of interest."

"It is undoubtedly correct," said Leo, smiling, "Herr Hensmann surely would not make a mistake in reckoning."

"It would be the first for many a year," said the book-keeper, bowing politely in acknowledgment of the compliment. He felt cheered and flattered by Leo's kindly words; but nevertheless, his eyes

rested with unmistakable anxiety upon Rudolph, who seemed to be examining the papers handed to him as keenly as if he were dealing with a total stranger, instead of his father. At first the young man's countenance expressed earnest but calm attention; suddenly a disagreeable change appeared on his features, he cast an agitated glance at his father, then looked again at the paper in his hand, and said roughly: "No, I can't agree to this."

"To what, Rudolph?" asked his father sternly.

"The interest reckoned here is only five per cent.—you would have been obliged to pay any banker six; any other merchant would have given me six, and I demand the same from you."

Herr Berger was about to make an angry reply, but Leo anticipated him. "For shame, Rudolph," he exclaimed, "to reckon so sharply, and speak so to your father. I don't understand how you can do so."

"Speak for yourself, and leave me to manage my own affairs," replied Rudolph. "I can demand six per cent., father, and I do demand it."

"Sharp—Herr Rudolph is terribly sharp," murmured the book-keeper, but no longer in the tone of complaisant admiration, with which he had formerly spoken of this trait in the character of the eldest son of the house.

Leo again spoke. "Rudolph," said he gravely, "if father considers five per cent. sufficient, it undoubtedly is, and it does not become us to say a word against it."

“Oh! it does not become you?” asked Rudolph ironically. “Very likely; but it is quite a different affair with me. The money the firm of Berger saves by the arrangement is an advantage to you, but not to me.”

“Oh! Rudolph,” said Leo in astonishment, “how can you reckon so closely, when you are only dealing with your father and brother, who certainly do not wish to take advantage of you.”

“Don’t they? Well, so much the better; then I shall get my six per cent.”

“You shall have it,” said Herr Berger, deeply angered, and his eyes, which had wandered from one son to the other, now rested gloomily upon Rudolph’s cold features. “Calculate exactly, Hensmann, how much must be added to the sum already specified, that not a penny may be lacking—I thought I was dealing with my sons, and intended to give them what, under similar circumstances, I should have taken from them: but I see I was mistaken, and we will give these young men no opportunity to accuse us of dishonesty.”

“Do not think so badly of us, father,” said Leo imploringly, “Rudolph was excited—”

“Yes, Rudolph was excited,” interrupted his father vehemently, “and is still excited with the fear that the firm of Berger may make a profit out of him; as if after my death, he would not have his share of all the gains of the firm! But enough of this—Hensmann, prepare the account and give it to the gentlemen, that they may be sure it is correct.”

"Dear father," Leo again interposed.

"Hush—Hensmann, we will pay the two gentlemen the balance due them."

"But sir," interrupted the book-keeper timidly.

"Do as I told you," said the merchant roughly, and the faithful clerk went into the counting-room with drooping head, while the father and sons remained in a very painful situation. Rudolph apparently re-read the paper he still held in his hand, but was really wishing for the book-keeper's return, for he felt painfully embarrassed; Leo gazed anxiously at his father, who stared gloomily into vacancy. At last Hensmann returned with the account, which the merchant held out to Rudolph with the question: "Is that correct?"

"Yes, father."

"Ah! Herr Berger," the book-keeper now timidly observed. "You ought not to be so angry, and not allow your sons to say another word. I'm sure Herr Rudolph meant no great harm, and if you should make him the offer you intended, he would embrace it with open arms."

"What offer?" asked Rudolph eagerly.

"I have no offer for you," replied old Berger sternly. "You withdrew from the firm on your wedding-day—this morning you have lost my confidence."

Rudolph cast down his eyes in confusion; but was vexed with himself for the weakness, for he knew he had not behaved in a manner unseemly for a clever merchant. At the same time, he was

burning with a desire to know what offer was to have been made him, and was now withheld. Hensmann came to his assistance. "Herr Berger," said he, "I see how deeply Herr Rudolph regrets that he has vexed you. You couldn't give him any greater pleasure than by affording him an opportunity to prove his confidence in you."

"Prove my confidence? How?" asked Rudolph eagerly.

"Be silent, Hensmann," exclaimed Berger angrily. "A man who has once given me to understand that I intended to overreach him, can never again enter into a business connection with me in any manner whatever."

"I am sure, father," said Leo soothingly, "Rudolph had no such meaning. He thought your opinion of what was due him a mistaken one, but I am sure he did not intend to insult you."

"Ah!" replied Berger turning sharply upon Leo, "so you too probably think my opinion about what was due *you*, a mistaken one!"

"Oh! father," said Leo looking sadly at the angry old man. He did not add another word, nor was it necessary. His father had already perceived the contrast between his former favorite, and his less valued son, too distinctly not to feel an unusual degree of affection for the latter. He laid his hand on his shoulder, and said gently: "Don't be troubled Leo; I know your filial love."

"My dear father, Rudolph loves you too, and if you will pardon his—I confess—somewhat business-

like manner, and tell us the matter of which Herr Hensmann spoke, you will see how gratefully my brother will accept your offer."

Herr Berger cast a hesitating glance at his eldest son, which the book-keeper interpreted as a permission to speak. "Yes, yes, we'll tell them, we'll tell Herr Rudolph and Herr Leo. The matter is simply this, Herr Rudolph: Herr Leo while in England called our attention to the hide trade with the South American republics, and arranged the necessary business connections. The matter is going on admirably, admirably, and has already brought us in many large sums. It would now be advantageous to extend this lucrative business, and so I—yes, I claim the honor—suggested to Herr Berger that he should propose to his sons to leave their mother's property in the firm, at a good rate of interest, that we may place our connections with BuenosAyres on still firmer foundations."

That is really an excellent idea, papa," said Leo, "and I willingly consent. Do you too, Rudolph?"

"Yes," said the latter slowly, "I should like to enter into the business—but I will not lend my money on interest. If I can receive my full share of the profits of my deposit, I will accept the risk; but no sensible man makes ventures without the expectation of a fair return."

Leo looked at his father in anxious silence, fearing the old man might find cause for fresh offence in his brother's words, but Berger said quietly: "Be it so—it is of great importance to me to ex-

tend my business with South America, and I should prefer to give my own sons a share in the profits, rather than pay strangers a high rate of interest, which in the present situation of the money market, might soon be necessary. Leo you can share the business on the same terms as your brother—how much will you put in, Rudolph?”

“I must first talk the matter over with my father-in-law. You shall have an answer to-morrow evening.”

“That is perfectly reasonable; your father-in-law is entitled to have a voice in the matter. Leo and Hensmann can give you the necessary information, that you may be able to afford old Hagendorf an exact account of the affair.”

“And Herr Leo,” asked Hensmann “how large an interest will you take in the business?”

“Father must settle that, dear Herr Hensmann, you know I always leave the arrangement of all such important matters to him.”

The faithful clerk cast an agitated glance at the young man, but shook his head, as in disapproval.

“Hensmann is only half pleased with you, Leo,” said Berger with a faint smile, “he thinks in matters of such importance you ought to decide according to your own mature judgment.”

“Ah! Herr Hensmann,” cried Leo merrily, “you surely know that I shall never become a thorough business man like my brother, you have told me so a hundred times.”

"No, you will never be that," said his father, but he did not utter the words in a disapproving tone, and gazed at the young man with such a loving, mournful glance that he felt strangely moved, almost alarmed.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN CONSULTATION.

After the counting-house was closed for the night, old Hensmann had another private conversation with his employer. "This has been a hard day, Herr Berger," said he, "thank God, it is over, and everything is so well settled."

"Well, Hensmann? It is more than bitter to stand in such relations towards one's children. But, to be sure, we have now secured a few months breathing time, and since C. & Co. still hold out—"

"Yes, I don't know how that happens; after the losses they have sustained, as I am positively certain, it is almost a miracle."

"Perhaps they are managing the same way that we do," said his employer bitterly, "holding out by the aid of their nearest, most trusted friends."

The book-keeper sighed. "Well, Herr Rudolph certainly has no superfluous confidence—that is, no generosity. But he must have *some* faith, or he would not leave a thaler in our hands which he could withdraw by any possibility."

"And so I am deceiving my own sons," sighed the merchant, resting his gloomy brow on his hand.

"But I don't believe Herr Leo is deceived," whispered the book-keeper anxiously.

"What?" asked Berger starting up. "What do you mean?—Leo—"

"Sees more clearly than you think."

"But how? why should he?"

The book-keeper shrugged his shoulders. "He is much more clever than we supposed, and has learned a great deal in England; but this is not all that sharpens his judgment in relation to our affairs. I see it daily; he reads more from your face than from the books."

"Hensmann," said the merchant in surprise, "you are beginning to make such strange assertions that I fear you are allowing Leo to infect you, and will become a greater dreamer than he."

"I have no objection," replied the old man dryly. "His fancies will be more profitable to us than all Herr Rudolph's cleverness."

Berger cast a searching wondering glance at his book-keeper, and then resumed the conversation: "You may be right; but I should like to know how you arrive at such conclusions."

"What conclusions?"

"Why, for instance, that Leo reads more from my face than from the books. Nonsense! What should he see in my face?"

"That you have some secret care, are tortured by anxieties, are no longer the same as before."

“For Heaven’s sake! Do you think I betray myself so plainly?”

“To no one but Herr Leo and me. I have heard from my father, who was also employed in this house, that in its ninetieth year the firm met with heavy losses, and for more than three years it was doubtful whether it could sustain itself. But my father has often told me, that, during all that anxious time, the master never allowed a stranger to see a cloud upon his brow, any more than he would permit a flask of Burgundy, or a pound of meat the less to be used on his table. You are just like him; no one can perceive any trouble in your face, though they rained upon us as thick as hail; no one.”

“I hope so. But you say Leo suspects that all is not right?”

“Yes, I say so, and I am not mistaken; and therefore I’ve been thinking whether it would not be better to tell Herr Leo the plain truth; we really owe it to him too.”

“Owe it to him? Why?”

“If he leaves his mother’s legacy in our hands now, he puts all he has into our business, literally all, while Herr Rudolph at his marriage withdrew with a handsome portion. If our affairs go wrong—I don’t say they will, but it’s possible—Herr Rudolph is secured by what he has already received, and by his rich wife; while Herr Leo—I don’t like to think how destitute and unprovided he would be! Therefore we ought to tell him fairly what he risks, if he leaves everything in our hands.”

Old Berger started up, walked restlessly up and down the room, resumed his seat, and then left it again to stand at the window and gaze now at the sky, now at the green foliage of the little garden, showing every sign of the most violent mental conflict; while his old employee watched him anxiously, but carefully abstained from aiding, even by a syllable, his answer to the question he had addressed to his conscience. He had forced himself to call his employer's attention to the obligation, which in his opinion he owed to Leo; but the merchant's decision might prove an injury to father or son; and as the book-keeper's interest in both was almost equally warm, he was determined that no consideration should induce him to turn the scale in favor of either.

The room was so still that Hensmann fancied he could hear the ticking of his big gold watch, and actually started when the merchant suddenly turned towards him and said in a hollow tone: "Tell Leo exactly how our affairs stand—I cannot. Do so to-morrow, as soon as Rudolph has gone; and now leave me."

After Rudolph's departure, old Berger and his son dined together, talking of all kinds of unimportant matters, perhaps because the continual entrance and exit of the servant would have interrupted any graver topics, perhaps because both were equally averse to enter upon the impending conversation, and therefore deferred it. At last they were alone; yet neither uttered a word, but in the same op-

pressive silence eat the fruit that formed their simple dessert. Berger now rose, pushed back his chair, cast a keen glance at his son, and turned as if to leave the room. Leo had also risen.

"Father," said he, "you will now probably wish to rest an hour; could I see you a moment alone in the course of the afternoon?"

"Has Hensmann spoken to you?"

"Yes, father."

"Then say what you have to say *now* ; replied the merchant, sinking heavily into a chair.

Leo sat down near him, and began in a most affectionate tone: "Dear father, when I tell you that it has grieved me deeply to see you so troubled, you will believe your son, and think the request I now make: that you should make use of everything I am and have, without scruple or reserve, entirely unnecessary."

"I thank you, Leo," said the merchant pressing his hand, "and I confess I scarcely expected you to take any other course; yet it grieves me that in order to hold out I am forced to accept all you offer."

"Of course, father, that is perfectly right. The firm and its honor lie as near my heart as yours; why should I not stake everything to maintain its former reputation?"

"But if we don't succeed in doing so, if we fail—"

"Do not yield to such sorrowful thoughts, father. Hitherto you have labored and struggled with your

cares alone; let us hope that it will prove some support to you, if from this hour, I stand by your side with all the loyalty of a son, and all the strength God has bestowed upon me."

"May Heaven bless your good intentions Leo; but we are in a difficult position; a difficult position which may perhaps last for years. I am truly sorry that, even under the best circumstances, I am compelled to embitter your youth."

"My youth!" replied Leo sorrowfully. "It lies behind me with all its joys and hopes, and henceforward I have no other object in life than to lighten your cares as much as possible."

"My poor boy! I fear I have heeded you and your happiness too little, been too careless of what apparently has deeply affected you. But believe me, I could not, dared not do otherwise."

"I know how good your intentions were, father,—Margarethe also rendered them full justice. But all that is over. I wished to make you another request."

"Another—what does it concern?"

"The affair with Rudolph, father. I must earnestly entreat you not to put any of his money into your business."

"Why not? If Hensmann told you all—"

"He did—all."

"You must perceive how urgently we need every thousand we can obtain from any source. It would cause us the greatest embarrassment if we were compelled to dispense with the fifteen or twenty

thousand thalers I hope to receive from Rudolph."

"There might possibly be some embarrassments, father, but I hope we should overcome them. We are certainly in no immediate danger; our difficulties, with the exception of a few trifling losses, are caused solely by the delay of the house of C & Co. in making the large payments they have owed us for a year. So long as the house does not fail, so long as the supposed losses we shall suffer by them are not known, our credit is not impaired and we can discharge our most pressing obligations with the means that remain. If C. & Co. fail, or even if their liabilities become noised abroad, it will recoil upon us in consequence of our well-known and numerous transactions with the firm. We shall then fail too, unless some friendly hand kindly and trustfully lends us means to withstand the first storm."

"I know all that," said Berger somewhat harshly, "but I don't see what it has to do with Rudolph."

"Have patience a moment longer, dearest father,—you have given me my free choice whether, under the existing circumstances, I would share your business or not; bestow this confidence on Rudolph, who as your son must prize the honor of the firm of Berger above everything—or," he paused.

His father asked anxiously: "Or—?"

"Or do not let him unconsciously share the dangers which we are about to encounter. Rudolph—I was ashamed of it yesterday—but I could not help

perceiving that he has a selfish, suspicious nature. If he sustained any injury through us, he would make us feel it more pitilessly than the greatest stranger, and I would gladly spare you this pain, inflicted by your own son. On the other hand, you are his father, and have always shown him so much affection, treated him so generously and kindly on the occasion of his marriage, that in the hour of misfortune he cannot help feeling as your son, and must perceive with grateful emotion that you spare him now, without regard to your own advantage; and if he then aids you for a short time with the large sums which, through his father-in-law's assistance, are at his command, we shall withstand the crisis and the firm of Berger will be stronger than ever.

The merchant walked slowly up and down the large dining room shaking his head as he listened to his son's words. When Leo paused, he again sat down beside him and said: "I assent to your antecedents, but your conclusion is not correct. I too have perceived Rudolph's narrow avaricious nature; but I have seen farther, and, I fear, more correctly than you. I shall find him no support, no consolation in the hour of need, nay, he will reproach me, little as I am to blame for the misfortune that has fallen upon me, because he will consider it detrimental to the amount of honor and distinction to which he believes himself entitled. Woe betide me if he suffers any material loss which I cannot immediately make good! No, you are

right; we will break off all business relations with him; but neither will we hope for anything at his hands. From you, Leo, you alone, aid must come to me or I am a ruined man."

"Surely, dear father," stammered Leo deeply moved, "you know I am ready to do everything in my power for you."

"Everything, Leo, everything?" asked his father in a significant tone.

"What would I not do, dear father?" replied Leo in surprise.

"Would you, to save me from ruin, resolve to make a—wealthy marriage?"

"Dear father! Oh! have you thought of this seriously?"

"How you shrink, how pale you have grown! In future think what the word 'everything' means before you utter it; but do not forget that a day may come when you must either sacrifice your father, or the last memories of your youthful dream."

CHAPTER XX.

COUNTERPARTS.

Ever since the evening when Louise felt so bitterly insulted by Count Guntersburg, it seemed as if all the gentle elements in her nature had been forced into the background, if not conquered forever, by sterner harsher emotions. True, she had never seemed mild and affectionate except towards her father; but neither had she shown any sharpness of manner. But now open arrogance replaced her former indifference; her cold smile grew bitter, her quiet bearing positively repellant. Baroness von Dornick perceived the change with surprise, almost alarm. She regretted having done anything in behalf of such an ungrateful, unreasonable creature, and resolved never again to assist in making a match except for her own daughter, who was now only eleven years old, and therefore would not cause her mother any anxiety in that respect at present. Countess Steinthal was more than surprised and alarmed; she was filled with anger and chagrin, and her former aversion to Louise, in-

creased to almost positive hatred towards her own child.

Louise had a difficult position, as Baron von Dornick following the example of his practical wife, studiously neglected her, and her father could not shield her from the coldness and ill-will offered to her in his own house; yet she knew how to sustain and protect herself amid all the painful scenes she was compelled to endure. She seemed insensible to the coldness of her relatives, unwounded by her mother's harsh remarks, and even unmoved by her father's anxious kindness. Calm and unshaken by the often extremely disagreeable treatment to which she was subjected, she persisted in the manner she had adopted, that of a passive but unmistakable resistance to all external influences, whether friendly or hostile; she appeared to be armed against every appeal, even those to which she might otherwise have yielded of her own free will.

Count Guntersburg was at first surprised and, in truth, not disagreeably surprised by this firm, self-possessed conduct in so young a girl. He doubtless perceived that the contest upon which she had entered must be waged against her mother, far more than herself, and that the Countess would be a stern, unyielding enemy. It amused him to observe which of the ladies would develop the greatest energy and perseverance; and that they might not lack cause for the struggle, persisted in his attentions to Louise, and even made them warmer than before. If it had hitherto seemed as if he watched

the Countess with a certain degree of care, in order to learn whether she possessed the qualities he required in his future wife, his eyes now followed her with interest, nay with a shade of sympathy. He no longer tested, he began to admire. The time soon came when he was no longer amused but attracted. He felt an ever increasing sympathy for the beautiful young creature who was battling unaided, yet so bravely, for her independence, her maidenly rights, and involuntarily took her part in the struggle between her and her mother, although he knew that the battle was also waged against himself.

Thus matters continued without any decision until Summer. Count Guntersburg only needed to speak to obtain the consent of Louise's mother—that her father had only a nominal voice in the family council had long since been clear to him—but he did not utter the words, because he felt that the mother's permission would no longer satisfy him, that his happiness required the free consent of the daughter, and this, he was forced to acknowledge, could not yet be hoped for. It was strange, very strange to him who had hitherto been so much sought, so much courted. He, one of the richest men in his country, of a rank second only to his Prince, still handsome and sufficiently young, sued—without any certainty of acceptance. He strove to win the hand of an insignificant young girl, his inferior in rank, wealth, experience and worldly knowledge, and he feared the possibility of being

rejected When he was not in Louise's presence all this seemed like a fable, an impossibility ; but as soon as he stood before her, and saw the proud eyes, the cold self-possessed demeanor, he felt only too plainly that any proposal from him would be instantly rejected.

Baron and Baroness von Dornick had left their relatives long before, and it was not allowable for Count Guntersburg to remain longer at Miltenberg. But as his wishes harmonized with those of Countess Steinthal, and both possessed the art of coming-to an agreement upon any subject, if necessary, by means of the most distant allusions and apparently unmeaning words, the Count when he at last took leave, was positively sure that the Countess would take her daughter to one of the Taunus springs about the middle of August, while she was equally sure of meeting Count Guntersburg there.

The appointed time arrived, and Louise found herself with her parents at the pretty baths, frequented by a large crowd, composed partly of fashionable idlers, partly of veritable invalids. The brilliant life of gayety and apparent happiness would have excited her interest, at least in the beginning, had not Count Guntersburg appeared at once, and been her constant companion on the promenade, and at the springs, balls, and concerts, her unavoidable attendant upon every excursion. Thus it became daily more difficult for her to maintain her ground against her mother, while her parents' relations towards each other grew more and more comfortless.

each day, because the Countess ascribed Louise's offensive conduct to the support she found in her blinded father, while the latter made vain, and therefore exasperating efforts, to guard Louise's right to a free choice in the selection of her future husband. It was wonderful that with his want of energy, and love of a quiet life he did not give up the struggle sooner; but he loved Louise with all the strength of his nature; she was the image and embodiment of the only real joy that had ever fallen to his lot, and he unconsciously cherished the idea that he might, in some degree, make amends to her for his sins against his early love, and his own happiness.

A small stream divided the narrow valley, which was almost entirely filled with the buildings connected with the springs, and flowed rapidly under a bridge. Louise, bending over the railing, was gazing with the utmost indifference at the waves as they rose and disappeared. Count Guntersburg stood beside her. They were, so to speak, alone; for her parents were a few paces distant, engaged in conversation with an old acquaintance whom they were unable to pass with a mere bow. The Count could not resist the temptation to take advantage of these few minutes, and Louise's at least apparently calm mood, and said in a low tone: "Countess Louise! You never have a kind word or a friendly glance for me, but, I implore you, in pity, tell me whether you at least know why, in spite of this, I prefer you to all others?"

"Yes, I know, Count," was the quiet reply.

"And Countess Louise—dear Louise, will you permit me to hope!"

She suddenly turned full upon him, gazed at him with a steady searching glance, and asked in an unfaltering voice: "Hope what, Count Guntersburg?"

"That I may at last, be so fortunate as to win this dear hand," replied the Count in a low, hesitating tone.

"At last?" asked Louise sternly, her eyes flashing proudly, almost scornfully. "At last? A few weeks ago you seemed to place very little value upon the possession. Or do you consider it fitting to begin a courtship with an insult?"

"Oh! Countess, you are cruel; "yet I must not complain; I have deserved all your harshness. But you are so wonderfully beautiful and pure, that I cannot help believing you kind-hearted too, so I beseech you to forget the presumption of which you have cured me; forgive a man who sincerely loves you, because, blinded by the influence of a dissolute worldly life, he knew not how to prize you at your true value; and make him good and happy by becoming his companion, and wherever it is necessary—his guide."

The Count had spoken rapidly, in a faltering voice, and now stood pale and trembling before the young girl, who he was well aware, must undergo a hard conflict if she did not wish to yield to the suddenly offered temptation to deeply humiliate the

man, by whom she had once been so pitilessly insulted.

Louise was really struggling with the eager longing to revenge herself. Her proud lip curled, her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled. But the impulse passed; she looked at the agitated man more and more calmly, at last even with an approving glance, and said: "You are rash, Count, to trust yourself in my hands unarmed. You must indeed believe me to be kind-hearted, or you would never have been able to risk this step; for you know that constraint is powerless with me; and even if my mother's wishes coincided with yours a thousand times, it would not avail you. For that very reason your frank hasty words surprised me; for you must confess I have given you no reason to suppose your offer would be accepted. Therefore I was so entirely unprepared, that I think it would be better not to answer either yes or no at present; I could give reasons for both, and this is neither the place nor time to discuss them."

"Ah!" said the Count, deeply moved, "I thank you for not having rejected me at once and entirely; there is at least a hope in that."

"Do not believe so until you have heard the conditions which I shall, in any case, attach to my consent," replied Louise with great coldness.

"Yet I will not despair. But when can I learn your decision?"

"I will await you to-morrow in my own room an

hour before dinner—but my parents are coming; let us ask in what direction we shall walk.”

Louise joined her father, Guntersburg approached the Countess, and they thus walked in couples across the bridge towards the opposite bank. Just before reaching it they met a pale elderly lady, leaning on the arm of a young girl dressed in deep mourning. The narrow space compelled them to pass very near each other, and thus Louise looked at the young lady more closely than usually happens in a chance meeting with strangers. She was surprised at the sight of the charming face, which in some strange manner seemed familiar, and involuntarily exclaimed in an under tone: “How exquisitely beautiful!” This attracted her father’s attention, and he too uttered a half suppressed cry: “My God, who is this?” he asked in a tone of such terror, that Louise looked at him anxiously. He had grown very pale, but was evidently striving to compose himself, and said in a voice that still trembled: “It is very warm; let us make haste and get into the shade, my child.”

They walked rapidly on. The Countess and Guntersburg also quickened their steps, and as the path grew wider, the Count moved to Louise’s side and said: “If you had a twin sister, Countess, I should declare that we had just met her.”

“The lady in black?” asked Louise carelessly. “It is possible that she may resemble me; her face seems familiar.”

Meantime the Countess whispered in a tone that

threatened to rob her husband of his hardly won composure: "Who is that, Steinthal?"

"Whom do you mean?" he replied in a tone of assumed indifference.

"Whom should I, but the young girl in black, Louise's living image!"

"The girl who just met us?" said the Count forcing a smile. "How should I know, Therese?"

"You *do* know," replied the Countess with a piercing glance. "But this is no time for such discussions; we will defer them until we are alone."

The walk that followed this little incident was anything but pleasant. Louise had again resumed all her former repellant coldness towards her lover, whose scarcely budding hopes thereby sustained a severe shock; the Countess' remarks were unusually bitter, even for her, and Count Steinthal only partially succeeded in concealing his anxious mood. In the evening he had another violent scene with his wife, who refused to believe his most solemn assurances that he did not know the black robed stranger. But deeply as he suffered from it, as was invariably the case when the Countess, in her pitiless manner, touched the secret wounds of his soul, he nevertheless resolved to discover the name of the beautiful stranger, who was so strangely like his haughty daughter, and bore even a closer resemblance to the unfortunate Helene.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGE BETROTHAL.

Countess Louise was alone in her own apartment, surrounded by the cheerless elegance which distinguishes the best rooms in large hotels. She had occupied it for several weeks, but thus far had done nothing to make its aspect more homelike and inviting. There was no little table drawn up to the window to hold a dainty writing desk, or the materials for some of the pleasant fancy work with which young ladies sometimes while away a leisure hour; no half finished drawing, or bouquet of fresh flowers revealed a taste for beauty in the occupant of the room; even her books lay piled upon a chest of drawers in a very unattractive manner.

It was only a few minutes before the time she expected Count Guntersburg, and she knew he would be punctual; but she betrayed no emotion of any kind, and was in truth, perfectly calm. Leaning back in one corner of the sofa, she was reading with earnest attention a book well calculated to enchain so haughty a mind—Goethe's "Torquato Tasso"—and enjoyed the beauties of the wonderful

poem, undisturbed by the near approach of the hour which was to decide her fate. She might well do so, for her resolution was firm and positive, and she knew that her future was in her own hands.

The Count was announced, and entered the room; she calmly rose to receive him, motioned towards a chair with equal composure, and silently resumed her own seat. He was thus forced to begin the conversation, and did so with great agitation.

“Countess—dear Louise—I have come to receive my future destiny from your hands. Oh! tell me that it is to be a happy one.”

“You give me credit for more power than I possess,” replied Louise, and neither blush nor quickened breathing gave witness of the slightest emotion. “It depends entirely upon whether, in your opinion, you can be satisfied with what I am able to offer.”

“You do not love me? You do not believe you can ever love me?” asked the Count anxiously.

“No,” replied Louise in a firm harsh tone. “You know how you came to us—with the insulting intention of subjecting Countess Steinthal to a test to ascertain whether she would please you, and in the insolent assurance that you need only stretch out your hand to the willing prey, in case you considered it worth taking. Did you suppose such was the way to the heart of a maiden, who still retained one spark of self-respect?”

“Countess—in pity, do not recall an error which

has caused me more shame and sorrow than I can express."

"Did you have any pity for me, when—but enough. You know the manner in which you appeared before me, and I have taken no trouble to conceal the deep indignation roused by your insolent attentions. If I had yielded to the impulse of my anger"—as Louise uttered the words, her eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed with unnatural brilliancy—"had I yielded to my anger, I should have rejected your offer yesterday with scorn, repelled you with horror—but—"

"But?" asked the Count, fairly trembling in his breathless suspense.

"For a moment I wished to do so, then it occurred to me that Count Guntersburg would have successors, that sooner or later another would come to humiliate me as he had done, and if I drove him away, still another. So I thought it would be better to content myself with this one degradation rather than enter into a perpetual warfare, or perhaps when all strength was exhausted, all self-esteem lost, become the prey of the worst of the opponents."

"And was *this* the only reason that withheld you from rejecting me yesterday?" asked the Count, turning deadly pale.

"This alone," said Louise. "You see I am honest, and would rather appear before you as a suppliant for protection, than as a deceiver."

"You seek my protection from—"

“From my mother, and—those like her.”

A deep silence followed the last word. Louise's glance rested steadily on the Count, who had leaned back in his chair and covered his eyes with his hand. “And this,” he said at last, looking up with an expression of mingled sorrow and anger, “this I am to consider as the acceptance of my ardent, earnest entreaty for your hand?”

“By no means, Herr Count,” replied Louise, who had again recovered the haughty composure which to the Count, was her most irresistible charm; “by no means Herr Count, you have only learned why I am inclined to accept your hand; the conditions upon which alone I would consent to do so, I have still to communicate.”

The Count started up: “You rely upon my love very confidently, Countess Steinthal.”

“No, Count Guntersburg; for I can dispense with it, as well as you with mine. This is the very point upon which I wished to speak. That I cannot love you is perhaps your own fault; that you do not love me is equally certain. You simply see in me the woman who is capable of filling the position which will be assigned in society to your future wife, and probably believe for the moment that you have a warmer feeling for me. But I think this is a mistake, arising from the novelty of our relations towards each other, a mistake you will soon perceive yourself. If after this explanation you still persist in your wish to make me yours, I will promise to conscientiously and punctiliously fulfil all the

duties of your future wife, provided, in return, you give me your word never to ask me to lessen the usual coldness of my manner towards you, or change it into warmth."

Vain, like the majority of men, almost forced to undue self-esteem by the homage of nearly all his equals in rank, and ascribing to his love for Louise a greater power and influence than she could estimate, the Count saw no danger in complying with her demands. Besides, his attentions to the young Countess were tolerably well-known, and he would have considered his honor wounded by a vain effort. Therefore he readily consented to the imposed conditions, and left the room as Louise's affianced lover.

CHAPTER XXII.

MARGARETHE INHERITS A FORTUNE.

We have now to discover why the modest Margarethe left her quiet residence in Bergefort to seek a gay watering place; for that she was really the lady who so closely resembled Countess Steinthal, our readers can have no doubt.

It was difficult for her to conquer the shock caused by Leo's sudden appearance, and the irrevocable separation that immediately followed, and she needed a still longer time to regain the beautiful calmness which had formerly distinguished her. At last, however, she succeeded, although in solitary hours she could not yet shut out the whole train of sorrowful thought; but as she knew the peace and happiness of her second father depended upon her, and that the old man loved her so tenderly that it would be scarcely possible to deceive him in regard to the real state of her heart, she made the most earnest efforts to crush down all sad memories and useless longings, and live only in the quiet duties and calm enjoyments of the present. This was by no means easy, for her natural inclination to dreamy

meditations had been fostered by her lonely life in the moorland cottage; and her early separation from Leo at a time, when, in consequence of her imperfect knowledge of the world and her own situation, she still securely trusted in meeting him again, had taught her to live less in the present than in an eagerly desired, beautiful future. But she struggled bravely, and thus could not fail to win the victory. She again brightened the old age of her benefactor by real unfeigned cheerfulness, and once more enjoyed with joyful recognition and grateful heart the benefits she owed to his care and protection.

How soon she found reason to rejoice over her efforts to cheer the declining years of her generous relative! His last day on earth was nearer than she had feared. His great age, and a slight weakness which had stolen upon him during the last few months, would probably have been dangerous symptoms to an eye more experienced than hers; but Margarethe did not perceive the signs of the impending misfortune until it appeared with all its agony and terror. A short illness snatched away the dear old man, in whose heart she had first learned to know how precious is a father's protection, how sweet the feeling of a child. When she stood beside his dead body, and was forced to tell herself that never more would his lips have a smile, his hand a loving caress, his voice a blessing for her, she felt as if she had never before known what it really was to be alone and desolate.

The world would doubtless have judged very differently of the present situation as contrasted with her former one. She was now the sole possessor of a great, nay for any one below the rank of a noble an immense fortune; for the originally large property of the dead man had been increased by the income from his lucrative office, and his simple mode of life, to an extent of which even his most intimate friend, a shrewd old lawyer who lived in the Justizrath's former place of residence, had no suspicion. By the dead man's last will this gentleman was appointed Margarethe's guardian and legal assistant, but with the express stipulation that he was merely to have the right to advise in the settlement of his ward's affairs, the latter having entire control over the whole inheritance.

Margarethe in her sorrow had no power to rejoice over the treasure that had fallen to her lot, nor in her inexperience of the world was she aware of the importance such wealth bestows, and even if she had known it, she would have placed little value upon the fact. She had no wishes that surpassed the bounds of a peaceful life, filled with good deeds, and did not even know the advantages of wealth in contrast to poverty and care. Poor as her life on the moor had been, it had never been wanting in anything which, in that region, was considered necessary.

She was determined not to leave her dear old home at Bergefort, to which she was still bound by the memories of the quiet peaceful years she had

spent here with the beloved old man, as well as the meeting which had assured her of Leo's unchanged love. But she wished to lessen in some degree the utter loneliness in which her uncle's loss had left her, and therefore applied to one of the teachers of the boarding school where she had spent several years after leaving Jost's cottage. This lady, by her wise, gentle character, had won Margarethe's special affection, and after her return to her uncle's house, the latter maintained a constant correspondence with her. A short time before, she wrote that constant teaching was beginning to exhaust her strength, and she had therefore resolved to resign her position in the school. Margarethe now begged her to act upon this resolution as soon as possible, and invited her to come to Bergefort and try whether the quiet of the little country house, united to the care of her grateful pupil, might not restore a portion of her lost health.

Fraulein Heber gratefully accepted the friendly offer. She wrote that she had dissolved her connection with the principal of the school before receiving Margarethe's proposal. The physician had prescribed perfect rest and the use of mineral waters as the only means of restoring her shattered health, but she herself thought that the first, in connection with Margarethe's nursing and the fresh country air, would completely restore her, and therefore at the end of the month—for which time she must remain at the school—instead of going to some gay

watering place, she would hasten to quiet Bergefort with the greatest pleasure.

The morning of the day when Margarethe expected to welcome her old friend arrived, and a feeling of quiet happiness stirred the young girl's heart, with the thought that she should now soon have some one on whom she could lavish her love and care, and who would be cordially attached to her. With cheerful interest she once more surveyed the little preparations she had made for the reception of her former teacher, and for the hundredth time assured the old cook, who was busily making arrangements for an unusually nice dinner, that Fraulein Heber was very, very easy to please, and she was sure would soon value old Dora as much as she herself.

Then she sat down to her breakfast in a lighter mood than she had ever felt since her uncle's death, and gazed through the window over the gravel walk to the old linden trees; the carriage which was to bring her friend would stop under their shadow.

A well known figure now came up the path; the old messenger who brought letters and similar small articles from the nearest post-town. He usually came across the bridge into the house, although the way was a little longer; for he was always invited to rest in the kitchen with Dora, and received in Summer a glass of beer, and in Winter a cup of hot coffee. He now greeted the young lady with a very important, well satisfied air, as if he was

conscious he was bringing something pleasant. Margarethe rose to take his packages in the entry, and invite him to go to the kitchen.

He did not bring much, and Margarethe scarcely expected anything more than a newspaper; she had few ties connecting her with the world outside of Bergefort, except those with Fraulein Heber, and she was coming to-day herself; therefore she was almost startled to receive a letter; for it was long before her usual time to have news from Jost and Anna of Nordhecke. But when she had read the missive, she laid it aside with a feeling of relief; it was from her guardian, and contained only business details, and a friendly inquiry about her health. She finished her breakfast, and took up the paper without any positive object; regularly as she had read it aloud to her uncle every morning, she had been so absorbed in her sincere mourning that she had scarcely cast a glance at the daily news since his death. To-day, however, while waiting with joyful impatience for her beloved guest, the time seemed long, and she half unconsciously seized upon it as a means of shortening the long hours. Thus her eyes ran over the columns with very little interest; and she reached the advertisements on the last page without discovering anything which could fix her attention, when her glance fell upon words, names—she turned pale, and the sheet fell from her trembling hand; but she took it up again, and now fixed her eyes more firmly and steadily on the fatal lines. Her pallor

increased, and her whole frame quivered, but she did not weep. She might have done so, and the tears would perhaps have afforded some relief; but she would not. She dared not yield to the grief she now suffered, for she thought it her duty to conquer it as soon as possible, to pitilessly stifle it.

She remained absorbed in meditation only a short time, then dressed hastily, left the house, took a long tiresome walk through the lonely, monotonous country, paid charitable visits to several sick persons, and at the end of several hours returned to the house utterly exhausted. Her pale face had gained a calmer expression, but when she entered her quiet chamber, the fair abode of such sacred, and hitherto sweet remembrances, fresh sorrow overwhelmed her, and throwing herself into a chair she covered her eyes with her hands. After a short time she rose and went into another room. "I will stay here till Fraulein Heber comes," she said to herself. "It is fortunate she arrives to-day; it will be best for me to leave Bergefors for a time, and she will gladly accompany me."

Fraulein Heber arrived, and was welcomed by Margarethe with the affection of a child. The elder lady rested an hour after dinner, and both were now seated together in Margarethe's pleasant room; the former relating a hundred little joys and sorrows of the career so lately closed, and Margarethe listening kindly and sympathizingly, but with an expression that betrayed it was costing her an effort not to follow quite a different train of thought

from that aroused by the eager speaker. The latter was so full of the importance of her own communications that it was a long time before she noticed her hearer seemed to have something on her mind, which might be of still greater consequence than Fraulein Clarchen's insubordination, Louise Stein's heedlessness, and young Auguste Biel's destructive pursuit of pleasure. But scarcely had she perceived the forced attention of her young hostess, than she gave the conversation another turn by the words: "I see I am very selfish, dear Margarethe; I am incessantly chattering about myself and my own little affairs, without asking whether you may not have something of far greater importance to communicate."

"I see that you still understand how to read my face," replied Margarethe with grateful affection. "Yes—I have something to tell you, a proposal to make. You will be doing me a real favor if you accept it."

"Go on, my child. You surely know it would make me very happy to be able to do anything for you; but I cannot guess how *I* can be of any service to *you*."

Margarethe smiled faintly. "Yes, you will be surprised at my wish. Or won't you think it strange that I, who begged you to share the quiet and seclusion of this house with me, now entreat you most earnestly, nay, implore you to exchange its solitude for a strange place and scenes of gayety."

"My dear child, I do not understand you."

"You do not understand me now, but you will soon be able to do so. You know my whole history—the—stain upon my birth, my poverty-stricken childhood with its unconscious deprivations, its one source of great, conscious happiness. You know my whole life, ever since my dear good uncle took charge of me, and what remembrances he permitted me to cherish, although he showed me that there was no hope." The young girl spoke in a gentle quiet tone; but her pale cheeks gradually flushed as she went on, and the hand in which she held a newspaper began to tremble. When she paused Fraulein Heber drew closer to her, and said in a loving, tender voice: "My dear, dear Margarethe, I know all this."

"Certainly—and I also told you whom I met unexpectedly here in Bergefort; how he found me out, how we both enjoyed an hour of unspeakable happiness, and then experienced the bitterness of an eternal, irrevocable separation."

"Oh! my poor child! Alas! alas, that this should have happened! I think it would have been better if you had never seen him again."

"It would have been better. Then I should not have seen his anguish, which seemed as deep as my own, and *this* would not have been such a shock to me."

She laid the paper before her sympathizing friend, and Fraulein Heber read:

*"Announcement of Betrothals.**"HULDAH NEUBERG.**"LEO BERGER.**"D—— August 5th, 18——."*

The kind old spinster ! When her eyes first fell upon the startling news, she turned as pale and trembled as violently as Margarethe herself had done. "Ah ! Margarethe, dear Margarethe," she faltered, "this news—and that meeting ! And—am I mistaken, or is it true that but a short time has elapsed since then ?"

"Not quite three months. When he parted from me I feared—yes, I *feared*—he would never overcome his grief at the separation ; he seemed so deeply moved. And in this room, yonder before the picture where my tears flowed after our first parting, I prayed for him—scarcely for myself—but oh ! how fervently for him. Now my prayer is heard, and I ought to be thankful that he has learned to forget, after he perceived the uselessness of his hopes. And I will be grateful ; but this has come upon me so suddenly that I have not yet found strength to do what has to-day become my duty—forget also. And that I may attain this necessary object more quickly and completely than would be possible for me to do here, I wished to beg you, dear Fraulein, to carry out your former plan—and take me with you."

Fraulein Heber did not make the slightest objection to a proposal which seemed extremely sensible.

Thus it happened that Margarethe met her father

and sister on the bridge at the Springs. The Countess' great beauty attracted her; but the cold surprise with which the latter, supported by the haughty assurance bestowed by the consciousness of her rank and her natural independence, gazed at the retiring stranger, caused the latter to hastily turn her eyes away; and she therefore failed to observe the effect her own face produced upon the others. Fraulein Heber, on the contrary, whose commonplace appearance protected her from exciting burdensome attention, had noticed more keenly, and observed Margarethe's striking resemblance to the beautiful young lady they met, as well as the surprise, almost terror, which had seized upon the party on the bridge, at the sight of her young charge. As she knew the stain on Margarethe's birth, the incident excited surmises which came very near the truth; but she carefully avoided all allusion to them, in order not to excite in the already troubled mind of her companion, a new, painful, and useless anxiety.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LEO'S SACRIFICE.

The more interested Leo became in his father's difficult situation, the greater sympathy he felt for the proud man, tortured by such oppressive cares. He saw more and more clearly that whenever the impending suspension of the house of C. & Co., occurred, it would become impossible for him to sustain himself without the self-sacrificing aid of a faithful friend; and that this assistance would *not* be forthcoming from Rudolph was absolutely certain. Leo had arrived at this sorrowful conviction when he informed his brother that their father no longer desired Rudolph to take an interest in the South American business. This conversation revealed the young merchant's utter selfishness in such glaring colors, that henceforth Leo hoped for nothing from his brother.

Two days after the interview, Leo and his father received an unexpected visit from Rudolph's beautiful wife, who came as an ambassador from her father and husband, in an affair which the united members of the house of Hagendorf perceived was

too delicate to be confided to the hands of any mediator less skillful and clever than Emma. Rudolph, during his conversation with Leo about Herr Berger's refusal to allow him to take an interest in his South American business, had obtained a glimpse into his father's affairs, though a very faint one; and as Leo rightly conjectured, considered the misfortune which had befallen the old and highly respected merchant, as an offence, a disgraceful wrong committed against *him*. He could not conceal his uneasiness about the impending disaster, and his clever wife soon discovered the cause of his anxiety. She insisted that he should tell her father; and although Rudolph at first struggled against making his father's embarrassments, which as yet he only vaguely surmised, known to a third person, even though he might be nearly connected with himself, she succeeded, as usual, in getting her own way.

The result of the conversation between the three heads of the Hagendorf family upon this subject, was the unanimous decision that Leo must give a new and sufficient support to the tottering house, by making a wealthy marriage, before the slightest rumor of the critical state of his father's affairs became noised abroad to render such an alliance difficult or impossible. Emma was therefore selected to make this delicate proposal to her young brother-in-law, and at the same time direct his attention to the young lady whom, principally on account of her *shining* qualities, seemed especially suited to

become the sister-in-law of so distinguished a lady as Emma Berger, *nee* Hagendorf.

She arrived in D—— with her eldest daughter, saying she wished to spend a few days with her relatives there, because her own house seemed so lonely while her husband was away on a short journey. She was at once cordially welcomed, and treated with the utmost civility and attention, but found it far more difficult to execute her commission than she had expected. In reply to a hint in regard to her designs upon Leo, which she addressed to her father-in-law, clothed in the guise of a jest, he answered gravely that he was sure Leo would never make any choice without his consent, but that he himself was also determined never to urge his son to any marriage which did not accord with his own wishes. She found it even more difficult to offer her advice to Leo himself. His quiet, extremely courteous manner, which precisely because he observed every punctilio of etiquette, permitted no forced confidence, made it almost impossible to effect any approach without open obtrusiveness, for which he afforded no pretext; and she dared not offend him, if she did not wish her plan to lose all prospect of success.

But Emma Berger was a resolute woman. On the morning after her arrival in D——, she turned to her brother-in-law with a request that he would accompany her to pay a few visits in the city.

“With pleasure, if father can spare me so long,” replied the young man unsuspectingly.

“Of course we can do without you a few hours. The boy has scarcely put his nose into the books, and already thinks himself indispensable,” added his father playfully. “But I am afraid our evenings will seem long to you, my daughter; can’t you persuade some of your friends to take tea with you in the garden, or share our supper?”

“You are very kind to give me permission, papa, and I will avail myself of it. I shall be very glad to spend a few hours with my old schoolmates, Clara and Anna Fritzen, or Huldah Neuberg.”

Huldah Neuberg was the young lady on whom she had especially fixed her attention. Fraulein Neuberg was very wealthy, and what was of the greatest importance under the circumstances, the fortune was not prospective, but already in her possession. She was her mother’s only child by a former marriage, and had come of age several months before, since which time the larger portion of her dead father’s considerable property had been at her own disposal. As she was also tolerably pretty and agreeable, people often wondered why she had not found a husband. The reason was a certain vein of romance in the young lady’s character, which led her to desire her future husband to possess all manner of qualities which were not usually to be met with among the young merchants of her native city, although it possessed men who were the equals of pretty Huldah Neuberg in every respect.

“If I understand you correctly,” said Leo as he

offered his arm to his elegantly attired sister-in-law, "some of these young ladies whom we are to visit had the pleasure of being in the same boarding-school with you."

"Yes, we were together at Mannheim."

"And you have never seen them since?"

"Yes, I have met them; but only at rare intervals and for a very short time."

"Then I can easily imagine your pleasure in once more entering into a longer intercourse with your schoolmates. Let us hope you will find the ladies all you expect, dear Emma."

"What do you mean Leo?" asked Emma in surprise.

"Why—I don't know whether it is owing to the beautifying power of memory, or the imperfect judgment of our youth, but the picture we preserve of the companions of our early life is very different, and often far more attractive than we find the reality, after a few years separation."

"Does the fault lie wholly in memory, or in our own opinions?" asked Emma.

"Where else could it be?" said her companion in surprise.

"In the change that has taken place in ourselves. We have advanced, obtained a wider circle of vision, established a higher standard of measurement, and what once seemed to suit us so well no longer satisfies us. But isn't that the Fritzen's house? Yes, Clarchen is sitting at the window, and has recognized us."

During the visits that now followed, Leo had an opportunity of seeing proofs of his sister-in-law's words. Emma greeted all her friends with great cordiality, and continued to be very affable until the end of the call, but became, as if involuntarily, somewhat colder and more reserved, and seemed to experience a little disappointment. There was but one exception, and that was in favor of Huldah Neuberg, whom from first to last Emma treated with the cordiality and affection of a sister. Here the Present seemed to mingle with a fair happy Past, without the slightest difficulty, and she appeared to perceive no other difference between herself and Huldah, than the one which must necessarily exist in the position of a married lady and a young girl, although she secretly acknowledged that there was another distinction, very much in her own favor. Unsuspicious as Leo was, he could not help noticing some design in his companion's conduct, although so carefully concealed, and when on their return home she was full of praises of Huldah Neuberg's loveliness, he looked her steadily in the eyes and said: "Although my very superficial acquaintance with these young ladies did not enable me to discover any difference between them, I could not fail to observe that Fraulein Neuberg is your favorite."

Clever Emma Berger felt fairly trapped; but she did not relinquish her design. Invitations were given and received, Leo was intentionally brought into Fraulein Neuberg's society, and now that his

shrewd daughter-in-law's efforts were directed towards a definite and practical object, old Berger involuntarily joined her, although her plans had at first greatly excited his indignation. Was Leo to be a bachelor because he had once indulged in a foolish dream? And, in truth, a match like the one with Huldah Neuberg, which would put an end to the embarrassments of the firm at a single blow, must be such a desirable thing for Leo, as well as his father, that it would be impossible for the young man to oppose it seriously. The matter was already so skillfully introduced, also; really Emma had not an equal among all the ladies of her father-in-law's acquaintance.

Leo perceived all these designs; but instead of being irritated, was, so far as his anxious situation permitted, amused by them. He consented to be Huldah's neighbor at table, her partner in a cotillion, or her companion on a walk; but he did all this only in compliance with a direct request, and never, even for a moment, went beyond the bounds of ordinary social courtesy. He always addressed her in the calm quiet tone of an indifferent acquaintance, and no warm, or even jesting word ever lessened the distance he was determined to maintain between Fraulein Neuberg and himself.

But this could not prevent the young lady herself from becoming interested in him, in her own half trifling, half sentimental fashion. She thought the young man—and with reason—uncommonly handsome; fancied he had a chivalrous manner,

although in reality especially towards her, it was remarkably grave and cold; and having heard something about a romantic youthful attachment, magnanimously resolved to console the interesting mourner.

As Leo was convinced that he should never, under any circumstances, be able to cherish any warmer feelings towards Huldah Neuberg, he as usual with men, took no notice of hers, and being wholly absorbed in the constantly increasing entanglements of his father's business, it also entirely escaped his attention that others, as well as Huldah, were beginning to look upon him as her future husband.

The house of C. & Co. still held out, and had even shown their gratitude for the discretion of the friendly house of Berger in keeping silence in regard to the dilatory manner in which the celebrated old firm of C. met their liabilities, by making tardy and—in proportion to the circumstances—trifling payments on account. Berger was again beginning to take breath for a moment, when several smaller firms by whom Leo's father suffered what, in his present circumstances, were considerable losses, failed very unexpectedly in quick succession. Rudolph who had formerly known Berger's connections with these houses, now saw the impending misfortune approaching in terrible proximity, and his wife again came to D—to, as she expressed herself, appeal seriously to Leo's conscience.

She began by telling her brother-in-law in his

father's presence, that she was amazed at his delay in making her friend Huldah a formal offer. Leo instantly rejected the supposition that he had justified any one in having such an expectation; but she persisted in the correctness of her view, at first gravely, then as Leo still firmly maintained his assertion, with positive violence. In consequence of this, an angry expression had already been uttered by her brother-in-law, and she was in the act of making an irritating reply when old Berger, who knew his son well enough to be aware that he was not to be influenced in this manner, interposed.

"Emma speaks from a desire to aid her friend," said he kindly, "and therefore you must forgive her if she grows somewhat warmer than we are accustomed to see her. I will not presume to decide whether right is on her side or yours, Leo; but I am as firmly convinced as she that pretty little Huldah loves you passionately. And," he added in a hesitating, agitated tone, "as your father's repose and happiness, nay—what is of infinitely more importance—his honor, depends upon your speedily making an advantageous marriage, you ought not to reject the affair so carelessly, my son; for you must surely know we have nothing to hope from Rudolph."

"From Rudolph? What do you mean, papa?" asked Emma, in a tone sharper than the old man had ever heard from her lips.

"Why, my daughter," he answered gravely, "Leo has placed everything he possessed at my dis-

posal, and did so with more and more readiness the more he became convinced of my critical situation ; while my eldest son, on the contrary, as soon as he obtained the most distant suspicion of my embarrassments, hastened to withdraw all the property that he had left in my hands. So you see as I can expect no aid from the oldest, I must depend entirely upon my youngest child."

"I don't understand," Emma began, repressing her excitement by a violent effort, "how you can make comparisons between such different cases. Ever since Rudolph entered my father's business, he has occupied an entirely different relation towards you from Leo ; and you, as a clear-sighted merchant, must admit, papa, that his duties not only to his wife and children, but especially to the firm of Hagendorf, are of such a nature that no others can be taken into comparison with them. So you cannot blame him or us—"

"I blame him and you for *nothing*," interrupted the old merchant bitterly. "Rudolph has become that for which I trained him—a thorough merchant. Leo has made himself something quite different : a good, warm-hearted man, a faithful son. I do not complain of either ; but my support and hope is in the latter." With these words he pressed Leo's hand affectionately, and left the room.

There were many similar conversations during the following days, and although Leo remained perfectly indifferent to his sister-in-law's urgency, he was gradually softened by his father's anxiety

and grief. Although an inner voice whispered that no person on earth had a right to rob him of his last gleam of happiness, the untroubled memory of his love, he was at last unable to make any farther resistance to the entreaties and anguish of the old man, who saw in him his only hope. He forcibly crushed down the outcries of his own heart, and resolved to offer himself to Huldah! Emma urgently offered to do so for him; but he decidedly refused.

Leo went to Huldah Neuberg to make his offer, and his sister-in-law looked after him, half satisfied, half with a feeling bordering on grief. "It is a pity," said she, "he would have suited a more brilliant wife. If I had known him before Rudolph—pshaw, these are idle thoughts! His courtship will undoubtedly be successful. Poor Huldah is desperately in love, and feels very proud of her supposed conquest. But he would have been in a condition to ruin everything at the eleventh hour, if I had not cleverly prevented it."

Meantime Leo entered Huldah's residence, and was shown into her room. A mass of flowers—there may be a superabundance even of them—a pile of books, and an innumerable quantity of plaster busts and statuettes crowded the tolerably large apartment; it almost required sleight of hand to reach Huldah's seat without injuring anything. But her suitor succeeded in doing so, and now sat beside her, grave and thoughtful as usual, but not with his customary composure. She soon noticed it,

and asked if he wanted anything? She would not have been very much surprised if he had answered that he wanted her to complete his happiness—Emma had prepared her for something of the kind—but he passed his hand over his pale brow, and replied very gravely:

“Yes, I want many things. I am oppressed with many cares and sorrows; a melancholy, heavily burdened man, little suited to be the friend and companion of a gay, care-free creature like yourself, Huldah. And yet I am here to ask you whether you would be induced to share my anxieties and sorrow, whether you think you can feel sufficient confidence and affection for me, to place your hand gladly and willingly in mine.”

This was not the wooing Huldah had expected: there was no word of love or admiration, no tone of passion in the voice. She looked at him in disappointment, and almost in anger, and replied: “I have heard that you—-that an early love—” and then paused, for she knew not how to continue.

“Ah! you have learned that! I should not have concealed it from you, even if you had had no suspicion of it; for you must know that I can only offer you a heart weary of bitter, exhausting conflicts, but without treachery or dissimulation. If you would be satisfied with the love I can bestow, I would strive with all my power to conquer the memory of the Past, and endeavor by the ardent loyalty and deep gratitude of a man who knows

how to prize your generosity, to make you happy, as happy as you deserve to be."

A girl whose head was less filled with romantic ideas than Huldah's, might perhaps have inquired into the cause of this singular wooing, but the appeal to her generosity aroused her pride as well as her better feelings, and vanity whispered that she could succeed in consoling her future bridegroom for the loss of his early love more quickly and easily than the latter now seemed to hope. So she held out her hand to him and said: "It grieves me that you cannot love me as—as betrothed couples ought to love, but it will make me happy if I am permitted to console you in your sorrow, and cheer your future life."

He was touched by these words, which seemed to reveal a treasure of generosity and self-denial, and pressing her extended hand to his lips, said more warmly than before: "This is really noble and generous; but I dare not take the hand you have so tenderly offered, or call it mine, until you know all."

"All?" asked Huldah in great astonishment.

"Yes; you perhaps think me rich, Huldah; but it is not so. You have doubtless often heard how uncertain a merchant's wealth generally is, and my father's business has not remained untouched by such fluctuations. He has suffered losses of late—I most earnestly entreat you to consider this a secret confided to you alone—by which his property has been considerably diminished."

Emma had expected her brother-in-law to make some such confession, and therefore wisely took precautions against it by finding a suitable opportunity to tell her friend Huldah of the somewhat exaggerated demands Leo would make upon his future wife, and that it was his special hobby to be loved for his own sake, as he called it. "He had," she laughingly asserted, "a childish dread that his future wife might marry him without really loving him, because he was the son of the rich merchant Berger." This supposed freak now recurred to Huldah's memory, and thus she placed no particular importance on the confession made with so much difficulty by Leo; but said with a merry smile: "Have I asked how rich or poor you are? I do not give my hand to your father's son, although I sincerely love the good old man, but to Leo Berger," and she added talking herself into a tender mood, of which she was very fond, "and in so doing, I seek your happiness far more than my own."

Leo, entirely ignorant of Huldah's secret fancies, was touched to his inmost soul by her unselfish affection, and in this manner was accomplished the betrothal whose unexpected announcement shocked Margarethe so deeply that, fearing her own thoughts, she fled from her quiet home life to a gay watering place.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STEINTHAL DISCOVERS HELENE'S CHILD.

Count Guntersburg was now Countess Steinthal's declared lover, and whoever was in at the time, and ventured to consider themselves even distantly connected with Countess Therese's aristocratic circle of acquaintances, offered their congratulations in the most approved form. The beautiful betrothed received them with the cold civility which she was accustomed to bestow, under all circumstances. Her lover, now that he had attained his wish and no uncertainty longer created for him an excitement of any kind, again relapsed into his usual indolence, and her mother—much as such a brilliant match gratified her pride—did not consider it fitting to represent the event to strangers as one in any degree *unusually* pleasing or elevating to her family and her daughter. Thus the young girl's father was the only person who betrayed any emotion at his daughter's betrothal; but his joy over his child's brilliant destiny was not unclouded. He loved Louise too ardently not to be an attentive and correct observer of her relations towards

Count Guntersburg, and he clearly perceived that although the Count's feeling for his betrothed was far warmer than hers for him, and it would not be difficult for Louise to awaken a sincere affection, neither she nor her future husband were animated by the love and esteem which are the surest foundations of a happy marriage.

But deeply as he feared for his daughter's future happiness, his interest in her was divided; other cares claimed his mind, burdened with the newly awakened memory of a guilty Past and its bitter fruit, ever gnawing, unavailing remorse. Margarethe's face, her striking, terrible resemblance to the beautiful victim of his passion and weakness, no longer allowed him to obtain any repose. He was determined to discover whether the young girl was his daughter, whether she was protected from want, in what circumstances and among what surroundings she lived, and whether she was happy, and well cared for, or needed his aid and protection.

He first sought for her name in the list of strangers. Her old companion was registered as Fraulein Heber, she herself as Fraulein Greven. Both names were wholly unfamiliar to him; he did not remember ever having heard them in Helene's home. And from Bergefort? Was it a small town, a village, or a country house? There was no such place in any neighborhood known to him. Meantime he met the young lady very frequently, for Fraulein Heber, like other visitors at the watering place, took her regular walks, always accompanied by Margarethe,

and the more frequently he saw her, the more firmly rooted became his conviction that she was Helene's daughter. Her resemblance to the dead girl was even more remarkable than the striking likeness by which Louise so painfully kept alive the memory of the lost one. In the Countess, the resemblance was only in form; but the young stranger possessed the expression also. Charming and intellectual as were the features of the young Countess, their lack of warmth and tenderness deprived them of the winning expression we call soul-speaking, and which Margarethe's beautiful face possessed in an unusual degree. This attractive expression had also distinguished her mother, and enchained the Count even more than her rare beauty.

The restlessness and anxiety in her husband's manner, did not escape Countess Steinthal, and she was not long in connecting it with the stranger's appearance. Although she had never really loved the Count, jealousy, as we have already mentioned, was not foreign to her character, and the feeling was especially directed towards all who had any connection with Steinthal's Past; therefore, she now carefully watched every step, and the tie which bound him to the unsuspecting Margarethe, soon became as clear to her as to him. He too perceived that it would be impossible for him to enter into any communication with the young girl, without his wife's knowledge, and his weak love for peace, his morbid horror of quarrels and scenes of every kind, were so great that the knowledge almost

drove him to despair. But the cry of his wounded conscience, which now had a powerful ally in his newly roused fatherly affection, would not be silenced; and he therefore resolved to confide in his future son-in-law, on whose honor he could rely, and who, as a man of the world, would judge the Count's error leniently. Count Guntersburg, who was not wanting in feeling and humanity, though both were very much concealed by the dross of a dissolute worldly life, and who always felt happy when in pursuit of any definite object, entered warmly into the wishes of his future father-in-law, and consented to be his ambassador to Margarethe.

Margarethe soon noticed how much the attention of Count Steintal, whose name and family connections had been communicated to her by some chance acquaintance made at the little watering place, was directed towards herself. The matter was disagreeable, especially as the scornful hostile glance with which Countess Steintal measured her from head to foot at every accidental meeting, almost converted her husband's respectful salutation into an insult. The young girl at last mentioned it to Fraulein Heber, and the latter now informed her of what she had noticed on their first meeting with the Count's party, and confessed the suppositions she involuntarily formed.

Margarethe was listening with some little agitation, when the servant entered and handed her a

card. She glanced at it carelessly, then changed color and asked: "Is the gentleman waiting?"

"Yes," replied the girl, "he says if you can't receive him now, he begs you to name some later hour."

Margarethe sat a few moments absorbed in silent meditation; but she could form no decision, and handing the card to Fraulein Heber, asked: "Shall I receive or decline this visit?"

"Receive it, my child. Why should you not hear what the gentleman has to say?"

In pursuance of this resolution, Count Guntersburg was ushered into Margarethe's presence. He had undertaken the mission without a sufficiently clear appreciation of its difficulties and delicacy. It would have been strange if it had seemed possible for *him* to meet with any obstacle; how should he, Count von Guntersburg, be betrayed into embarrassments in an interview with a mere *roturière*? And yet this actually happened, when after the customary greetings, he sat before her and saw her clear eyes fixed upon him with an expression of inquiry. He felt that it was his place to speak, and therefore began the conversation, but whether what he said was specially distinguished by tact and wisdom, he could never fairly decide.

"You are surprised to see me here, Fraulein," he began, "and I should not have presumed to introduce myself to you, did I not come in the character of an ambassador from Count von Steinthal."

"Of course I had no suspicion of the cause

which procured me the honor of your visit, Herr Count," replied Margarethe with apparent composure, though really greatly agitated, "and now that you have told me you made the exertion in order to oblige Count Steinthal, I am equally unable to guess what, by any possibility, he can have to communicate."

"I am not entrusted with any communication, Fraulein, but a question."

"A question?"

"Yes, Fraulein, and indeed, I ought to inquire whether you have never been known by any other name than the one you now bear?"

"Herr Count," exclaimed Margarethe, and the vivid blush that crimsoned her cheek, followed by an equally unusual pallor, clearly showed how deeply she considered herself insulted.

"I beg your pardon, Fraulein," said the Count somewhat alarmed, "I did not intend to offend you, I came solely with the desire to render my honored friend Count Steinthal, and perhaps you also—a service."

"To me, Herr Count?" asked Margarethe, who had entirely regained her composure. "I do not misunderstand the kindness of your intentions, but permit me to assure you that I desire no services from any one, nor do I need those of strangers."

The Count's embarrassment increased; but he collected his thoughts, and after a momentary pause continued: "I believe you, Fraulein; but I entreat you to consider my earnest desire to be of

use to Count Steinthal in a matter which lies very near his heart. And as I suppose this respected lady—he made a slight bow towards Fraulein Heber—is nearly related to you—”

“My friend is as thoroughly informed of everything concerning me as I am myself,” replied Margarethe.

During this digression the Count had lost the thread of the conversation; he hesitated a moment, and then said, apparently without any connection: “You bear a striking resemblance to my *fiancee*, Countess Steinthal, Fraulein.” As he seemed to expect an answer to this remark, Fraulein Heber observed that she had also noticed the likeness.

“It is true,” continued the Count, “and as Countess Louise strongly resembles a lady with whom her father, Count Steinthal, was very well acquainted in his youth, and greatly admired—” he hesitated; how was he to finish the sentence without offending Margarethe, which he had certainly no desire to do, for he had been very agreeably impressed by the quiet dignity of her bearing. Fraulein Heber came to his assistance. “And so you desire to learn whether Fraulein Greven is related to that lady, Herr Count?” she asked.

“The affair stands as you say, dear madam, precisely as you say, and I should be very glad if you could give me any information concerning it.”

“We cannot do so until you have the kindness to tell us the lady’s name, Herr Count.”

“Oh!—very true—her name was Lorsberg, Fraulein Helene Lorsberg.”

“Oh! God!” faltered Margarethe, in a low tone. She had turned deadly pale, and trembled violently; but it was only for a moment, then she regained her self-control, and asked the Count with pallid lips, but in a perfectly calm voice: “And for what purpose does Count von Steintal wish to ascertain whether there is any relation between Fraulein Lorsberg and myself?”

The Count had lived too long in a world where people learn to understand half uttered words and fleeting glances, to overlook or misinterpret Margarethe's suppressed emotion; but he was so charmed by the quiet composure she maintained in so painful a situation, that he replied with more warmth and sympathy than any lady of his own rank had ever won from him: “My highly esteemed friend, Count Steintal, has bestowed his entire confidence upon me, and thus I have learned that for many years he has desired nothing so eagerly and painfully as—as—to discover the daughter of the charming lady, who was so dear to him.”

Margarethe could not speak, she cast an imploring glance at Fraulein Heber which the latter interpreted, as Margarethe wished, to be a request that *she* would address to the Count the questions her own lips could not utter. The elder lady, though greatly agitated, therefore gently interposed: “And are we to understand that Count Steintal is the father—of this orphaned child?”

“Certainly, my dear madam, and that he hopes his daughter will believe the assurance he gives her through me, the assurance that he has never ceased to love her mother, or long for his child.”

“Oh! my mother, my unhappy mother,” murmured Margarethe. In spite of her struggles, her tears burst forth in a hot, stormy, passionate flood. There was a conflict raging in her heart, more agonizing than all the sorrows she had ever felt before. From her uncle’s story she had learned to love and grieve for her mother, and for her sake had hitherto cherished towards her unknown father a feeling nearly allied to hatred; and yet the first words that came to her from this unknown father spoke of unforgotten love, unconquerable remorse. She felt these tardy advances as an insult to her dead mother; and yet a gentle voice pleaded for the father who had sent a messenger to speak of his agonizing longing for the child of his early love.

The Count and Fraulein Heber respected her only too natural grief, by maintaining an unbroken silence; but she did not try their patience long. With her usual self-control, she conquered her excited feelings, and said with a tolerable degree of composure: “I must beg your pardon, Herr Count, for making you a witness of my emotion: but everything you tell me is so new, so surprising, that I can scarcely give an account of my feelings, even to myself; still less understand the reason why the—the Count von Steinthal sends me this startling communication.”

"I see I have caused you more sorrow than I expected, Fraulein," said the Count in a tone of respectful sympathy. "If I had foreseen this, I should have been far less ready to undertake the commission; but I did so, as I must once more repeat, solely from the desire to render a man whom I esteem as highly as Count Steintal, a favor he could ask from no one else. This must be my apology for intruding into an affair which, as I see with regret, is so painful to you. As regards the Count's motive in sending me to you, it was his wish first to learn whether you were really the child of the cherished love of his youth, whom you so closely resemble, that even the unfamiliar name you bore could not wholly crush the hope; and then he desires nothing so ardently as to ascertain through me whether your present circumstances are agreeable to you, or whether—whether it would be permitted him by—his protection or his—his assistance, to contribute in any way to your happiness."

The Count found it very difficult to make this offer, as he noticed Margarethe's flashing eyes, and the sudden hauteur apparent in her manner, although the young girl's simple dress and surroundings did not indicate great wealth. She rose before he finished speaking, with a gesture which strongly reminded him of his haughty betrothed, and replied in a measured tone: "I thank you, Herr Count;—you mean well—but say to Count von Steintal that I do not understand how he, the husband of Countess Therese, the father of her aristocratic

children, can offer Helene Lorsberg's daughter a protection which would subject her to far greater humiliations than her present isolation. As for the assistance he so generously offers me—since the child under age could, and was compelled to dispense with it—she certainly will not claim it now; nor does Helene Lorsberg's daughter need the wealth for which her mother was sacrificed. The child of the deserted girl, who, it is true, spent her early years in a day laborer's hut, now controls a fortune which might even serve to uphold the coronet of a ruined Count."

"Ah! Fraulein," said the Count, "I almost feared the offer would anger you; but I promised the Count to make it, and thought myself bound to do so."

Margarethe already regretted that she had allowed her pride to carry her so far, and therefore replied in her usual gentle manner: "I beg you to pardon me, Herr Count, and do me the favor to communicate to Count Steinthal in a more fitting manner what I have told you—I confess with shame—with unseemly violence; that my perfectly independent situation renders all assistance unnecessary, and I fear any advances from the Count would rather endanger than strengthen the quiet peace, which forms the sole happiness of my life."

"Oh! my dear young lady," pleaded the Count, "do not refuse so decidedly, the request I ventured to make in the name of your—your father. It is not his intention to approach you here, where it

might cause an unpleasant scene; but it would make him very happy if you would allow him to visit you at your residence."

"If Count von Steinthal," replied Margarethe, "were an unfortunate man, poor, lonely, and needing the care of some faithful hand, I should consider it my duty to risk everything to relieve his misfortunes and afford him consolation, deeply as my unhappy mother and myself have suffered through his fault. But he is rich, distinguished, the husband of a haughty lady who is his equal in birth, the head of a blooming family; it is impossible for him to need me, and therefore I do not think it inconsistent with my duty to most earnestly entreat him not to endanger the modest contentment of my life, by any interference, from which, I fear, no benefit would result to him or me."

Margarethe firmly maintained this resolution, and Count Guntersburg at last found himself compelled to acquaint her father with it. "So she *is* my child, my dear Helene's daughter?" he asked. "Ah! I was sure of it from the first moment I saw her. And she will not see me? She has no compassion, no feeling for her father? Oh! her mother would have been incapable of such cruelty."

"Consider," said Guntersburg, "that in her opinion, you have done that mother a heavy wrong, that she has never received any aid or sympathy from you until now, while both have been so abundantly supplied from another source that she can reject yours, Count Steinthal, with just pride;

for although she asserts that her early years were spent in a day-laborer's hut, she must have been carefully trained since. It is not alone that she declared herself the owner of a large fortune, but she possesses culture which reveals the most careful training."

"All her mother's relatives whom I knew, were unusually cultivated, and most of them distinguished by rare mental endowments. But you have not told me, Count, where she resides, how and with whom she lives, and whether she is happily situated, apart from the advantages of wealth."

"She did not give me the slightest information in regard to all this; and she has a manner of repelling undesired questions, which would do honor to a trained woman of the world. I must confess she is superb. Although she seems so fondly attached to her mother, and rejects your advances, dear Count, it is very evident that the Steinthal blood flows in her veins."

"You are mistaken, my dear friend. As you speak of her you describe Helene; Helene Lersberg, when she lived and loved me. But you have done so much for me, and in such a friendly manner, that I could almost find courage to ask still more."

"What is it, dear Count. Have no hesitation in calling upon me."

"Go to her once more. Implore her to give me some more definite information about her past and present life. Tell her I will yield to her wishes,

difficult as it is for me ; but I cannot rest unless I have some farther particulars concerning her."

Count Guntersburg did not set out on his visit to Margarethe with as much readiness as on the first occasion.

The latter received him reluctantly, and only in compliance with his urgent entreaty, gave him a tolerably ample outline of her past and present circumstances, and then earnestly implored him to induce Count Steintal to leave her to herself as entirely as before.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGE MEETING.

Count Guntersburg's two short visits to Margarethe had produced a singular result. The great resemblance between her and Countess Louise led him unconsciously to make comparisons between the two half-sisters, and these were not always in favor of the latter. He found pride and self-respect might be expressed without the bitter mingling of arrogance, and that she would be still more charming without this quality. He also discovered that a young lady might show affection and sympathy for those around her, without sinking to the level of common-place, and that the most beautiful face becomes still more lovely by the frank expression of the feeling of a pure, noble heart. And when he made these half-unconscious observations, and involuntarily drew conclusions from them, a feeling wholly unlike anything he had previously experienced, overmastered him, and wishes entirely different from any he had hitherto cherished stole over him, till he reproached himself for being a childish dreamer, who ought to be ashamed of him-

self. But it did not avail; the thought, the dreams, returned, and conquered him so frequently and noticeably that it even attracted the attention of Louise. She generally had no eye for the changes in her lover's moods: she had no affection for him, and desired none; she merely wished to pass through life at his side as usage and custom required. How could it arouse her interest whether he was light-hearted or thoughtful, grave or gay? She knew the Count sufficiently to be compelled to observe the strange alteration in his manner, but she did not feel the slightest anxiety about it, or take the trouble to ascertain the cause. When in his society she was as quiet, formal, and cold as ever, until the reason of the change that had taken place in her lover suddenly flashed upon her. Then she grew anxious, but outwardly only became colder and more reserved, and the gulf between her and her future husband seemed to widen more and more.

Louise was driving with her mother along the bank of the pretty river which flows through the valley of ———. Count Guntersburg rode beside the carriage, occasionally exchanging some commonplace remark with her, carelessly uttered and negligently answered. At a sharp turn in the road, which made it necessary to drive more slowly, they met two ladies in another open carriage. The Count bowed very respectfully, and they courteously responded to his greeting. Louise instantly recognized the beautiful stranger on the bridge,

whom she had since frequently met in her walks. This girl was a painful enigma to her. Her father's alarm when she first appeared, had not escaped her attention, neither had she forgotten that Count Guntersburg thought she bore a strong resemblance to herself; but although she placed no special importance upon the matter, she always felt painfully agitated whenever, on an accidental meeting with the stranger, she saw the respectful interest with which her father saluted her, while the young girl seemed rather to shun than seek the greeting. But her mother's conduct was even more unpleasant; the latter did not ignore her husband's courteous attention to the young lady, but took very insulting cognizance of it, a proceeding which Louise, who with all her want of consideration, was never positively unwomanly, highly disapproved.

She intentionally overlooked the recognition between her lover and the stranger, although unpleasantly affected by it. She supposed the Count's attention had been called to her by her father, and felt much too secure in her own lofty sphere to think of any serious rivalry with one apparently so far beneath her. But Countess Steinthal's passions were far less regulated by self-consciousness and self-respect than her daughter's. Her pride did not express itself by placing a high estimate upon herself, but by seeking to degrade others. Besides, the idea of her husband's secret Past, of which she knew just enough to feel uneasy, was the point on

which she was especially irritable; if it was unexpectedly touched she instantly lost all self-control.

"This young person seems to be one of your particular friends, Count," she remarked carelessly, but her eyes were fixed searchingly upon Guntersburg's face.

"Your supposition is quite correct, Countess, I have the happiness of knowing this charming lady."

"That is strange; she does not belong to our circle."

"Certainly not; but she would be considered the brightest ornament of any society."

"You rely very strongly on the forbearance of your betrothed, Count," said the Countess, who was becoming still more irritated, with an acrid smile.

"How so, Countess? Countess Steinthal is far too sensible—especially in her feelings towards me—to believe or wish that our betrothal should have made me blind to the charms of every other lady."

Louise was very much irritated by her mother's want of consideration in carrying on such a conversation with the count in her presence; and therefore the words she now uttered, with a careless smile, were addressed quite as much to the Countess as to Guntersburg: "I can be all the more at ease on this point, mamma, as the stranger's whole charm lies in her resemblance to me; it is merely by that she has attracted the Count and papa."

The Countess was silent, almost alarmed by this

open, apparently artless expression of a fact which so deeply irritated her; but the Count quietly replied: "Your judgment is correct, Countess Louise; I was originally attracted towards the beautiful stranger by her resemblance to you. But after I had the pleasure of being permitted to converse with her several times, I paid her the just due of a warm personal admiration."

"And may we ask," said the Countess somewhat jeeringly, "who had the honor of introducing Count Guntersburg to this unknown person?"

"He did so himself, Countess, but certainly not without being provided with satisfactory references."‡

Louise saw that her mother's irritation was constantly increasing; and although in spite of her coldness, the Count's want of consideration in expressing his admiration for another in her presence secretly offended her, she was determined to avoid a scene. She therefore carelessly observed: "I have often heard that there are girls and women of intellect and culture in the lower circles which are closed to ladies of our position. It must really be very sad for them; for their talents will find little sympathy among their equals, and therefore it may well seem an especially fortunate event when a gentleman from our circles occasionally strays into their sphere."‡

"Not always," replied the Count with a peculiar smile. "Besides culture is not so rare among the majority of the men in those circles, as you seem to

suppose. I admit that they are generally wanting in the more refined forms of society; but in knowledge, in information of various kinds, they are usually our superiors."

"Knowledge, however, is not synonymous with culture," said Louise, leaning back in the carriage with an air of arrogant superiority. "For instance, who has such a fund of knowledge and such a remarkable want of good breeding as my brother's tutor!"

"I agree with you there; but such exceptions do not disprove the rule. As soon as knowledge passes beyond mere closet scholarship, it exerts a favorable influence externally; and we rarely find offenses against good manners united to real intellectual culture."

Such opinions from the Count excited the greatest surprise in Louise's mind. At that time, the different classes of society were far more widely separated from each other in respect to social intercourse than is the case at the present day. Although the traditional respect for high rank had greatly declined among the cultivated middle classes, and they were doubtless conscious of the importance of their own power, resting on industry and knowledge, the majority of the members of the so called aristocratic circles still sought to blind themselves to these facts, and organize a still stronger resistance to everything which they considered assaults upon time-honored, hallowed customs and usages. Thus, in consequence of her

birth and education, Louise could not fail to judge with the most perfect ignorance of the true state of affairs in this case, and moreover, supposed Count Guntersburg was induced to adopt opinions so completely opposite to her own, either from mere caprice, or because he was for the moment allured by the charms of a girl belonging to one of the classes the Countess considered so infinitely inferior. True, she did not fear for an instant that her claims upon him as her future husband might thereby suffer injury; yet her pride rebelled against the thought that it could enter his mind to make comparisons between her and this *roturiere*, and that the scales might turn in favor of such a person. But she would rather have died than betray any apprehensions of this sort, so she held the veil of cold pride and careless indifference firmly before her lover, though both were gradually becoming mere pretence. She had involuntarily begun to watch the Count, to notice the expression of his thoughts, feelings, and opinions, to guess the cause of his moods, and a person about whom we occupy ourselves in this manner can no longer remain indifferent to us. However inaccessible we may appear, we are secretly affected by his opinions and disturbed by his moods.

Thus life at the watering place dragged on uncomfortably to the Steinthal party, and all the members of the little circle really felt relieved when it drew towards a close. But before this period an

event occurred which exerted an important influence upon the young Countess' future.

Louise, accompanied by her father, Count Guntersburg, and several casual acquaintances, had ridden out to a forester's house, which on account of its distance from ———, was visited only by the most enterprising guests at the watering place. They intended to take some refreshments in the little garden, and then return home by a pleasant mountain path, but an unexpected shower of rain compelled the party to enter the house and order their lunch to be brought into the little coffee-room. This was already occupied by two ladies, who judging from the books, writing materials, and needle work by which they were surrounded, seemed to have settled down permanently here. Such was the case. To avoid the unpleasant meetings with the Steinthal family, and yet enable her old friend to enjoy the strengthening mountain breezes a few weeks longer, Margarethe had gone out to this rarely disturbed woodland solitude; but her fate seemed to pursue her, and even here she met the very persons whom, of all the world, she was most anxious to avoid.

None of the party took any notice of her except Count Steinthal and Count Guntersburg, who as usual, bowed with marked courtesy. The ladies returned the salute, and then resumed their former occupation; Fraulein Heber was knitting, Margarethe drawing. But it was impossible for the latter to steady her hand sufficiently to guide the pencil;

in spite of her efforts not to notice it, she felt that she was attracting the attention of all the company, and with this painful sensation could not continue her work. She therefore said a few words to Fraulein Heber in an undertone, closed her portfolio, took up a book, and left the room with her companion. After her departure a few indifferent and apparently unconstrained remarks were exchanged between those left behind, about her beauty and striking resemblance to Countess Steinthal, and then they passed on to other topics. Louise joined in the conversation for a time with her usual cold, indifferent manner; but it cost her a great effort. She was secretly irritated by the meeting, accidental as it was; but still more by the respect her father and lover displayed towards this double who was so repulsive to her. Therefore she seized upon the first plausible pretext for leaving the room, and in spite of her clinging riding habit, walked down the wet, narrow garden path. Her father and Count Guntersburg exchanged a quick, anxious glance; but both feared to make her absence still more remarkable by joining her at once, and therefore a considerable time elapsed before Count Guntersburg followed her.

Meantime Louise, out of humor, irritated, nay, almost quarrelsome, walked up and down under the dripping cherry trees in the little garden. She had selected that portion of the grounds which was not overlooked by the windows of the coffee-room; for in spite of her anger, she had sufficient power

of reflection not to wish to afford a spectacle for the party within. The same reason also influenced Margarethe, when she made her retreat, and she chose for her temporary asylum an arbor covered with luxuriant roses, and protected by a wooden roof, so far from the house and so concealed behind the cherry trees, that she thought she should be safe. But her expectation soon proved vain; she had scarcely regained her calmness after the incident which had put her to flight, when the Countess appeared before her terrified gaze, walking rapidly up and down the path with glowing cheeks and flashing eyes. "Oh! Fraulein Heber," whispered Margarethe, "there is the Countess—Countess Steinthal. I hope she won't come in here."

"Oh! no my child; she is merely walking," said the old lady soothingly. But she had scarcely uttered the words, when a fresh gust of wind shook the wet foliage of the cherry trees, and such a heavy shower of rain-drops poured from the leaves that Louise involuntarily looked around for some sheltering roof, and took refuge in the arbor, which she supposed to be vacant.

At her entrance Margarethe involuntarily rose to go out into the open air. If she had quietly retained her seat, Louise would have been no better pleased; she was just in the mood to take everything as an insult, and feel the necessity of expressing her indignation to some one; so she asked angrily: "Why do you shun me, Mademoiselle?"

Margarethe's heart almost stopped beating at the

tone of this question; but the unmerited insult roused her to a spirited self-defence, and looking at the Countess with a firm, steady gaze, she answered: "Because, whenever I have the misfortune to meet you, I always read hatred and ill-will in your eyes."

The Countess was surprised, and could not help acknowledging her rival's presence of mind. But this only vexed her the more, and she asked as sharply as before. "Hatred and ill-will! Is it possible that you expected kindness and affection?"

"No, Countess, that was *impossible*; for I was as ignorant of your existence as you probably were of mine, until you forced yourself upon me."

"Forced? Are you aware that you make use of very singular, insulting expressions?"

"I merely answered your questions truthfully, and—I did not seek this conversation."

"Oh! this is too much! Do you suppose I would ever have wasted a word upon you, if chance had not so rudely brought us together?"

Margarethe could not long maintain the mood of angry pride, so foreign to her nature. Besides, Louise's resemblance to her dead mother, of which Count Guntersburg had spoken, and the conclusion he had drawn from it, had awakened an eager interest in the Countess. When she now saw her hostile half-sister so near her, violent, angry, full of hate, and yet so beautiful, beautiful with her mother's features, as a little crayon picture she had inherited from her uncle still represented them, her

heart melted and she said gently, with tearful eyes: "I am only too sure you would not."

Louise was astonished. If, in spite of herself, she had been compelled to recognize a proper self-respect in the haughty anger with which Margarethe had previously answered, there was something in the sorrowful gentleness of these words which moved her against her will. "Ah!" said she with a deep sigh, gazing inquiringly into the earnest face, which now, in its expression of unaffected sweetness, seemed far more beautiful than before, "but if you neither expected nor desired anything from us, why did you seek our vicinity?"

"You are mistaken, Countess; I never did so. I knew that there was a Count Steinthal, that his wife was a Baroness von Metelen, that he was the father of her children. I also knew that in consequence of these ties he ceased to have any existence to me and mine, and I thanked God every day of my life that he was nothing to me. Thus utterly indifferent to him and his family, without any definite knowledge of his residence, his mode of life, or his present abode, I came with my old friend for the benefit of the springs. Here I became the object of attention from Count Steinthal and the members of his family, an attention very painful to me. To escape it I left—and it is not my fault that it has followed me here."

"It was not intentional; it was chance, mere chance," protested Louise. "You have convinced me that it was also an accident which produced

your meeting with us, and I therefore beg you to forget anything in my remarks that may have wounded your feelings."

"I shall remember nothing, Countess Steinthal, except your peerless beauty and loveliness, which—attractive as they may be—can never make you so truly, inexpressibly dear to any creature on earth as to me."

"What do you mean?" asked Louise in suspense, which almost made the words seem like reproof.

"Oh! Countess, when I see you I think of one now dead, whom I fondly love, and in spite of one unhappy error, most highly honor; and of a man who, as I now, to my great comfort, am permitted to believe, yielded to the force of circumstances with remorse and anguish."

"Do you speak of my father?" asked Louise in a low tone, blushing deeply.

"Of Count Steinthal. I sent him a cold reply to a kind message communicated through Count von Guntersburg; and if it were not too presuming, to ask you—"

But Louise did not hear the last words, and interrupted her with the question: "So that is the way Count Guntersburg made your acquaintance. Did my father send him to you?"

"Yes; Count Steinthal suspected that I was his daughter, from my resemblance to my dead mother, and as he knew nothing of my situation or circumstances, cherished the kindly wish to give me his

protection and assistance, should I stand in need of either."

"Oh! that is right, my father did right. And—has he made a sufficient provision for you? Are you satisfied with what he will do?"

Margarethe smiled. "Excuse me, Countess; Count von Steinthal is to do nothing—as has always been the case—but—"

"Oh!" interrupted Louise, speaking eagerly and very rapidly. "You mean you refused it, because—because—you think, you fear—it may place my father in a disagreeable position, because my mother—let it pass. But let *me* undertake the charge of your happiness—I am about to accept a destiny, which at least secures me the advantages of great wealth—and I should be reconciled to my lot if I were permitted to lighten my father's sorrow and guilt. Oh!—do not turn away—do not take offense at this—if you will allow me to care for your future, you will be rendering *me* a favor; and besides I have a right to do so, for—we are sisters."

"Oh! God," stammered Margarethe, deeply moved, "Countess Louise—dearest Countess—may God repay you with the richest blessings, the greatest happiness, for the word you have spoken. I will make no claims, found no wishes upon it; but I will never, never forget it to the last hour of my life; and if ever the warmest love and deepest gratitude were united in any human breast, they live in my heart for you."

Never before had Louise heard the language of

warm impulsive feeling, never before had tender enthusiasm been poured forth in her presence with natural, irresistible sweetness. And now she herself was the object of all this ardent affection. She knew not how it happened, but her inherited and acquired coldness melted before the warmth of a happiness hitherto unknown, and her whole heart struggled towards the person who had aroused the exquisite emotion.

The two young sisters looked at each other a moment, smiling through their tears; then Louise opened her arms and Margarethe lay on her bosom. Clinging to each other in a close embrace, with cheek pressed to cheek, they experienced a moment of pure, unclouded happiness.

Fraulein Heber had left the arbor unobserved, and the sisters sat silently and affectionately side by side. They gradually grew calmer; Louise inquired into Margarethe's life and circumstances, and assured her with joyous warmth that she need have no farther anxiety, she would hasten her marriage with Count Guntersburg; then she would be independent and Margarethe should lack nothing a sister's loving care could provide.

Margarethe again smiled, and clasping Louise's hand said warmly: "You are full of kindness and affection, and I thank you from my inmost soul. But what would you think of my request if I begged you to give your hand to Count Guntersburg only when you could also bestow your affection, or at least your sincere esteem."

"That is impossible, dear Margarethe, and it would be bad for us both if I was obliged to wait so long."

"Not for me," replied Margarethe with another smile, "you need not provide for me. See, I am wearing mourning. I have lost a dear friend, but his death, in the opinion of the world, has made me rich. Oh, that this wealth, to which I have hitherto been so indifferent, might be able to save you from an alliance I view with so much dread."

"What do you mean, Margarethe?" asked Louise, and a shade of her usual gloomy sternness overspread her face.

"See," whispered Margarethe, "that is the expression on your beautiful mouth, I fear, I fear for you; for it promises you no happiness. That is the way you look when you are at the Count's side—or even worse. With that cold smile and gloomy look you can never possess, or bestow peace."

"I do not hope for, or need happiness."

"It is not well for you to think so; not well for you to say it so angrily, so defiantly. Oh! dear Louise, if this man, who nevertheless seems to love you, inspires you with feelings of aversion, reject him utterly, rather than make yourself and him miserable forever."

"It is too late; my marriage with him is irrevocably settled."

"Oh! do not say so; my acquaintance with him is very slight, but sufficient for me to know that he is not hard-hearted. He will not wish to compel you

to seal the misery of your whole future by a marriage with him."

"I do not know; perhaps he can be generous; but it is useless to think of it; circumstances which you cannot understand, compel me to accept the hand of some *grand seigneur*, and—as I told him—it might easily be some one worse than he."

"You told him that? You spoke so to him. Oh! Louise, Louise, never do such a thing again; try to make him forget it, or release yourself from him at any cost."

"I cannot, I tell you; and they are no empty words. Oh! Margarethe, you do not know what it is to have a parent's house: that is a misfortune; but it is a greater one to long to escape from it as from—a hell."

"Louise, my poor dear sister."

"Dear Margarethe, you were not the only one who suffered for our father's sin; I too am compelled to bear a part of the atonement. My mother cannot love the child, who—as she unfortunately learned—has *your* mother's features. This mysterious resemblance, which won the heart of your father and mine, forever estranged hers from me, and she will never rest until I leave her house, no matter with whom."

"But is there no other asylum for you? Have you no relatives to whom you might go? If all I possess could smooth the way for you, how happy I should be to be able thus to discharge a portion of the debt of gratitude I owe for your love."

“Never!” cried Louise, rising impetuously with an angry flush crimsoning her fair face. “Countess Steinthal can never accept favors from a—a—”

She paused, suppressing with difficulty a word which might have been very insulting.

Margarethe looked at her with sorrowful earnestness, and answered gently; “No, I see you cannot; and yet had I needed assistance, I would have accepted aid from you, although never from Count Steinthal—even if I had been in the most abject want. Then I must see you become Count Guntersburg’s wife—alas! to your endless misery.”

“Don’t grieve, Margarethe,” said Louise, who had regained her composure. “There is no way of averting this misfortune, and I was betrothed long ago.”

“Yes, there is one,” exclaimed Margarethe warmly, “and you can make use of it. Oh! do not turn away from me so coldly, as if I were the poor Count himself, who would so gladly be your grateful, faithful friend if you would only allow him to do so. I am sure that you are dear to him; for he even sought to be kind to me because I reminded him of you. He is not a bad man, dearest, indeed he is not; for he can recognize goodness amid whatever insignificant surroundings he may find it. Oh! Louise, you who are so beautiful, so gifted, so capable of affectionate feeling, for my sake do not be so cold and repellant to the man towards whom you have undertaken the most sacred duties.”

“For your sake?” asked the Countess, somewhat disagreeably surprised.

“Yes, because it will be one bright spot in my memory to which I can fly when all else is cold and dark; one creature whom I love more than myself, on whom rests no stain of wrong, not even the shadow of a neglected duty. Dear sister, for my sake, try to be happy and make him so.”

“Forgive me, Margarethe, forgive me if I misunderstood you for a moment, and if you ever hear anything good of me, if you see that I am happy and make him happy”—she said this with such a charming smile that Margarethe gazed at her with delighted eyes—“think that it is the echo of this hour, which is diffusing peace and blessing over my life.”

As the sisters rose to take leave of each other they saw Count Guntersburg standing at the entrance of the arbor, watching them with deep emotion. A cloud darkened Louise’s brow; but she conquered her rising indignation, and asked kindly: “Did you hear what we were talking about, Count?”

“Only a little, only the last words, and I beg your pardon—”

“You need not, it is well that you did hear us; for now you, too, will know whom you have to thank, if your future wife becomes the pattern of an excellent married woman.”

“Oh! Louise, if my future is to be a happy one, no one but yourself can be the creator of it.”

As the sisters clasped each other in a parting embrace, Margarethe whispered a request that Louise would take Count Steinthal a respectful greeting, and give him the assurance that she would hold him in affectionate remembrance. With these words they separated; but before Louise left the little watering place, the young girls had a long undisturbed conversation in the lonely forest house, and did not part without a promise to share their cares and sorrows, wishes and plans. Although neither was rich in hopes, they were calm in the consciousness of a good, firm purpose.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SUMMER FRIENDS.

The house of C. & Co. justified old Berger's fears, it really did fail; but for the prudence of their old business friend, a prudence which was also beneficial to himself, the mischance would have happened sooner. The firm of Berger & Co. still held out, although creditors, pressed upon the house from far and near. Leo's marriage was close at hand; it would take place in the course of the month; if Berger succeeded in struggling along until then, he hoped to recover from the blows he had sustained, not only without injury to his mercantile credit, but even without his most intimate acquaintance having the slightest impression how near he had been to utter ruin.

In his previous consultations with Huldah's mother and step-father he had arranged that, on the wedding-day, a portion of his future daughter-in-law's property, nearly equal in amount to the sum Leo had inherited from his mother, should be invested in the business of Berger & Co. As they then believed him to be perfectly safe, they made

no special objections to this. With this sum he could maintain his old connections in the usual manner; and would not be compelled to contract his business in any way, or to act more cautiously and hesitatingly than usual. And if he succeeded—which appeared by no means difficult—in keeping things in their customary state even one year, he would not only considerably increase his capital, but, which was still more important to him, his credit in the financial world must stand higher than ever, when people saw that his property had scarcely been affected by such heavy blows. So he held his head as high as ever, and flattered himself with the hope that he should live long enough to be able to leave Leo more than Rudolph had received from him.

Just then a house in C. failed, whose notes the unfortunate Berger held to a large amount, and on whose security he had firmly relied, but it had suffered heavily by the fall of C. & Co.

Now, for the first time, Leo saw his father utterly helpless. The old man sat in his private office, holding in his hand the unlucky notes which had just represented so large an amount, and had now become mere worthless bits of paper; listening in stupid silence to the loud questions and answers, coming and going in his counting-room, which showed the ever increasing distrust of his situation. He had sent for Leo, but had not spoken a word to him since his entrance, though his son repeatedly

asked, "Did you want anything, father? Have you any commission for me?"

At last the old man rose, uttered a deep sigh, passed his hand over his pale brow, and said half to himself: "It must be!" Then he turned resolutely to his son and began: "Hitherto I have been an honest man, against whom no one could utter a word of reproach. Honest I am still; for I am unfortunate, but not guilty, yet I am no longer free from reproach, for every one who loses even a penny by me, will accuse me of having cheated him, although it is a lie. But this terrible lie will have the semblance of truth, for I am no longer in a position to be just to all my creditors. Matters have stood thus ever since *these*—he threw the worthless notes scornfully upon the table—have become bankrupt."

"Father," said Leo sorrowfully, "perhaps they are as innocent as we."

"It is possible, nay even probable," replied Berger in the same gloomy tone as before; "You see that I, who may expect to share their fate in a few days, and believe they did not act dishonestly, am not disposed to judge their fall leniently. Imagine from this, how others will express their opinions who suffer losses by us without being disposed to indulgence, by the approach of similar dangers."

"Dear father, your consciousness of innocence—"

"My consciousness of innocence?" interrupted the merchant bitterly. "I tell you from the moment my failure is announced, I shall be con-

scious of nothing except that my debts exceed my assets, for I owe people whose claims—just claims—I cannot satisfy.”

Leo did not contradict him. He had the same strict business principles as his father, and suffered no less acutely from the impending danger that threatened his honor as a merchant. The old man rose and walked up and down the room several times, then paused before his son, and looking him steadily in the face, asked: “When shall you be married?”

Leo slightly changed color, and replied, “On the 19th.”

“To-day is the 7th,” said his father; “so there are still thirteen days—that is too long. Can’t you find some pretext to hasten your wedding?”

“Hasten my wedding?” asked Leo somewhat alarmed, but still more astonished. “That is impossible, father.”

“It must be done, Leo, *must* be. We cannot hold out until the 19th. The Hamburger notes fall due on the 14th, all other claims that can be made upon us will be paid; but it will nearly exhaust the ready money, and when these are presented unless we can previously secure new supplies—to speak plainly—unless we have the Neuberg money in our hands, we must stop payment.”

“Yes—it is sad, sad,” murmured Leo, who at this moment was thinking more of the unavailing sacrifice he had made of his love, than of the ruin of his house.

"Yes it would be sad, worse than sad," said Berger, not in the sorrowful tone his son had used, but with some slight return of his former energy, "and therefore it must not be. You must be married before the 14th, Leo, at all events."

"It is impossible, dear father. Huldah's parents would not allow a marriage day already so near, to be hastened on any pretext whatever."

"Then," exclaimed the merchant, "her money must aid me before it; I am going to her father," and he resolutely seized his hat to set out upon his difficult errand. But Leo seized his arm and held him back. "Father," he said imploringly, "don't do this, pray don't do it. You do not know how hard a sacrifice I am making for you in wedding an unloved wife for the sake of her wealth which is indispensable to you; but while still only betrothed, I never can nor will consent to appear before her in the character of a beggar."

Old Berger was dissuaded from his resolution with great difficulty, and when he at last yielded to his son's entreaties, it was only in appearance. He was determined to explain his affairs to Herr Oldenbrook, Huldah's step-father, without Leo's knowledge, and obtain a promise that the matter should be kept secret from him.

The unpleasant walk was spared him, but in a very unexpected manner. He had been working busily at his desk until the approach of twilight, and was considering whether to send for a light and continue his employment, or go to Huldah's step-

father instead of waiting till the following day. He had just decided to do so without delay, as it was one of his maxims never to defer a disagreeable task, when to his surprise the door of his room was opened, and Leo ushered in his future father-in-law. "Herr Oldenbrook wishes to speak to you, dear father. I told him he would not disturb you."

"No, certainly not; no visit could be more welcome. But let us go into the sitting-room, we shall be more comfortable there."

"Not yet, Herr Berger," said Oldenbrook with a somewhat formal manner, "I won't disturb you; I don't doubt you have a great deal to do, and therefore will not remain long."

"Oh! don't be so ceremonious; business hours are over, my clerks are all gone, and I don't see why an old fellow like myself should be tormented, any more than the young people."

"Certainly not, if there were no matters that can't be trusted to young people; and I almost fear, Herr Berger, you have your hands full of such things now."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Berger, who had been unpleasantly chilled by Oldenbrook's manner, together with the turn he had almost forcibly given to the conversation, and casting aside all appearance of considering the visit one of mere friendship, he resumed his seat, and said in a dry business-like tone: "Sit down, Herr Oldenbrook."

His guest took a chair, hemmed, looked at Leo, who had seated himself on a sofa at the back of the

room, glanced at Herr Berger again, and then began without any circumlocution, like a man who wishes to discharge an unpleasant duty as quickly as possible. "Is it true that you have lost heavily by the last failure in C.?"

"It is true," replied Berger calmly, though he felt he was turning pale.

"Ah—that too—that's bad, very bad."

"Yes—it has seriously affected us."

"Oh! and after the losses which, as every one knows you suffered from the failure of C. & Co.! I hoped the rumor was not true, though it greatly alarmed me. But of course, if you admit it yourself, there can be no farther doubt."

"But I have only acknowledged it to you, Herr Oldenbrook, because I look upon you as an intimate friend, almost a relative, and I most earnestly entreat you to observe the strictest silence."

"What—do you expect to hold out?"

"We shall be able to do so, if—" the unfortunate man hesitated—his fate depended upon the next moment, the good will of the man who sat gazing at him with such pitiless scrutiny.

"If?" asked Oldenbrook suspiciously.

"If before the 14th, we can obtain a sum sufficient for the payment of some notes which fall due on that day."

"I most heartily wish you may be successful, Herr Berger, but I doubt it."

"You doubt it?"

"Do not you yourself? Who would have the

courage to trust even the smallest sum in your hands?"

"Herr Oldenbrook!" passionately exclaimed Leo, who had listened to the conversation with painful interest; but he controlled himself, and continued: "Remember that you are speaking to a man whose honor is stainless."

"I fear," replied the merchant in a gentler tone, "I am speaking to a ruined man, and I deeply regret it; but my visit concerns you, young man, more than your father."

Herr Berger breathed somewhat more freely, under the influence of an illusion whose vanity he was to perceive only too soon. He supposed Huldah had sent her father to her lover's assistance; bitter error!

"And what do you wish to say to me?" asked Leo.

"My wife and I have consented to your betrothal to our daughter. This was done under a supposition, which as I am now compelled to learn to my great regret, was founded entirely upon an error. You will therefore let our duty as parents apologize for us if we—although very unwillingly, I assure you, very unwillingly—recall our promise, and beg you to consider your engagement to our daughter at an end."

Leo trembled from head to foot. To be rejected thus! But with a violent effort he forced himself to remain calm, and asked in a voice whose agitation was scarcely perceptible: "What do you mean

by a mistake, on account of which you no longer consider my betrothed bound by her promise?"

"Why that must be perfectly clear to you! When we gave our consent to your marriage with our daughter, your father's affairs were not yet involved—at least so we supposed—but now—good heavens, you must understand what I mean."

"I understand you perfectly; but you are laboring under a mistake. Huldah does not need your consent to her marriage with me. You are not her father, and she came of age six months ago. Huldah's mother—at least I hope so—will not desire to destroy her daughter's happiness because my dear father has met with unmerited misfortune. And Huldah herself—"

"Huldah herself," interrupted Oldenbrook, "is far too good and sensible a child not to allow herself to be guided by the wishes and opinions of her parents."

"Impossible; that is impossible!" exclaimed Leo rising impetuously. "Huldah cannot be so faithless, especially as she will suffer no disappointment from the misfortunes of our house; for I made no secret of my father's embarrassments."

"Poor child! she says you hinted something of the kind to her, but she did not believe or misunderstand you."

"Misunderstood? I spoke plainly enough! But I will go to her; she shall tell me her decision herself."

Leo hurried through the streets to the residence

of his betrothed with a quicker step, a heart beating more violently than had ever been the case before; for this was the first moment that he had ever really desired to possess her; partly from the rough manner with which they now strove to break an alliance which they had formerly so visibly sought and favored, and partly because he had been a deeply sympathizing spectator of his father's sufferings during the painful conversation with Oldenbrook. His own future had become more indifferent to him than ever, and he was firmly resolved to exert all his influence over Huldah to save his father.

Meantime it had grown dark; and when he reached the square before Huldah's house, he saw a light shining from her windows. He rushed eagerly up the steps, on which his foot had so often lingered with a reluctance scarcely acknowledged, even to himself, and entered Huldah's picture and flower adorned apartment. She was leaning back in a deep arm-chair, with swollen eyes, holding a wet pocket-handkerchief in her hand. So she too had suffered and wept for him. It was not as they said, she could not cast him off so heartlessly.

Her mother was sitting beside her. At Leo's entrance she rose with an air of offended dignity, and said harshly: "I should have expected more consideration from you; I really hoped you would spare my daughter a scene, when she has already suffered so much."

"Pardon me, Madame Oldenbrook; I have no

desire to make one; and it would grieve me deeply if I were compelled to cause Huldah sorrow. But I hope that this will not be the case."

"Your acts do not agree with your words, Herr Berger; you must surely feel that after what has happened, your presence here is an annoyance to my daughte

"My presence an annoyance? An annoyance to my betrothed? That is impossible, Madame."

"My daughter is no longer betrothed to you Herr Berger; I suppose my husband has informed you of the fact, and that this circumstance is the cause of your present agitation, which you would have done better to have spared us."

"It is true, Madame Oldenbrook, your husband did pitilessly make this insulting, offensive communication; but I could not believe it, and therefore hurried here to hear from Huldah's own lips that she does not deserve the reproach of faithlessness."

"You are perfectly correct, sir; she does not deserve it; it would be more appropriate to reproach *you* for having deceived the poor innocent child."

Leo turned from mother to daughter with an impetuous, angry gesture. The latter was leaning back in her chair, sobbing audibly, but she did not speak.

"Huldah," said Leo very earnestly, "You hear the words which bring so heavy a charge against your affianced husband, and do not contradict them."

"Are they not true then?" sobbed Huldah

"True," exclaimed Leo with an outburst of indignation, which made Madame Oldenbrook shrink, and checked Huldah's tears, "true? In what—speak out plainly—in what have I deceived you? Wherein have I ever misled you."

"I thought, I naturally supposed," faltered Huldah in terror, "that you—that you—that your father—"

"That my father?" asked Leo with his eyes fixed sternly on her face. "I beg you to proceed."

"Well—that your father belonged to the first merchants in the city."

"My father belonged, and does still belong to the first merchants in the city; you were not mistaken there. But wherein have I deceived you?"

Huldah was silent, and again began to cry. Her mother wished to speak for her, but Leo said firmly: "Do not try to come to Huldah's assistance, Madame; for it would only lead us farther from the goal; she must speak for herself."

"Ah!" moaned Huldah, "I—I really thought you would be more delicate, and not torture me with questions which are so painful to me. But I see I have been mistaken in you there also."

"There? And where else? You must speak plainly, Huldah," persisted Leo inexorably

"Oh! of course in the belief that—that you had a fortune equal to mine; and now we have been forced to learn that—that your father—"

"That my father is on the verge of failure," said

Leo with a sorrowful glance. "But until to-day he had well-founded hopes of being able to hold out, and with God's help he will succeed. But however great my father's present necessities may be, you could not have been surprised, Huldah."

"I could not be surprised?" she asked with more vivacity than she had hitherto shown. "Good Heavens! every one is surprised, the shrewdest business men did not suspect it; how was it possible for me to know?"

"Because, Huldah, when I offered you my hand I told you frankly of my father's embarrassed circumstances, and have alluded to them several times since."

"Ah!" said Huldah in an under tone, "how could I think such speeches had any foundations in truth? I suppose you talked of such things merely—merely to put my—my love to the test!"

"Huldah!" exclaimed Leo angrily.

"Yes—of course I did. What else was I to think of it?" asked Huldah, now sitting erect in her chair, with growing indignation.

"What were you to think of it? First, that I cherished a desire to act towards you like a man of honor, and also that your betrothed husband esteemed you too highly to consider you merely as the partner of his pleasures; that he would far rather seek and find in you consolation in the hour of sorrow and care. Now you know I have spoken the truth, that I am really an unhappy man weighed

down by the heavy blows of fate, who has nothing to offer you but a faithful heart, and a strong, industrious hand. Will you accept these trifling gifts, which you have so often said were dearer to you than all the treasures of the earth?"

"Good Heavens, Herr Berger," said Madame Oldenbrook impatiently, "Huldah has already repeatedly assured you that she considered your former hints as mere tests of her affection, and replied to you in that supposition."

"And Huldah, what do you say now?"

"That I," stammered Huldah, forced to speak by his steady gaze, "that I—that mamma is right, when she thinks I should be incapable of disobedience to my parents, although my heart bleeds, and I have undergone such a bitter struggle with my great love, which—oh—makes me so very unhappy."

"So this is the way you bear the test when it really comes," said Leo in a low trembling voice, fixing a half compassionate, half scornful glance on the weeping girl. Poor creature! And I was just beginning to feel a sincere affection for you, as sincere as is possible for a man, who—but why do I speak of that here? Good-night, Huldah; I am very sorry to have given you cause for these tears; but calm yourself, you will soon forget me, and another, a richer man, will make you happy in your own way."

He left the room; Huldah heard the door close

behind him. She started up! "Oh! mamma, has he really gone?"

"Thank God, yes."

"Ah! I shall never see him again, and I loved him so very, very dearly."

"Don't be foolish, Huldah. Thank your Creator that we make this discovery at the right time. You had a narrow escape from becoming a bankrupt's wife, or standing in the gap with your whole fortune."

"Yes, mamma, he treated me very badly."

"Well, he would not acknowledge it, and it is not to be denied that your folly serves him in some degree as an apology. You ought not to have been such a goose as to promise him your hand without telling your parents his scrupulous confessions about the state of his property. But such stupidity is the fruit of your everlasting novel reading."

Leo hesitatingly entered his father's room. The lamp cast its light upon open letters. Old Berger sat before it, but he was not working; he raised his heavy eyes to his son's face, and after gazing at his sorrowful countenance a moment, held out his hand to him. "I see, Leo, that you have done violence to your heart, and tried to induce your betrothed to keep her vows. It is all in vain—be it so. We will pay our debts so long as we can call a penny our own, and then may God provide for the future. Come, I am hungry and tired; we will have our supper and then go to rest."

“May God strengthen you, father; nay, He is doing so now. We will wind up our business here with the utmost conscientiousness, and then leave D——. Henceforward my whole life belongs to you alone, and thanks to the education you have given me I shall not fail to find employment which will enable me to secure you a peaceful old age, free from care.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

MARGARETHE MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

After the departure of her young mistress, Margarethe's servant spent a very quiet time in the house at Bergefort, and although she tried to fill up the hours as much as possible by scouring and cleaning they had seemed very long to her. But like everything else Dora's solitude at last drew towards an end, and the day arrived which was to bring Margarethe and Fraulein Heber back to Bergefort. The good old woman rose at dawn because she fancied there was still a great deal to be done ; but before noon all her preparations were completed, and a weary time of idle waiting ensued. Dora knew that it would be almost night before her young lady could arrive, yet she gradually imagined she must come sooner, and no creaking peasant wagon rumbled over the wretched pavements of Bergefort without rousing a hope that it might be her young lady's carriage.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when the noise of wheels and horse's hoofs again became audible through the open windows of the kitchen.

Dora was firmly determined not to let herself be fooled this time, and resolutely kept her seat. But what was that? The rattling of the wheels did not die away along the high road; on the contrary the wagon came nearer, and now rumbled over the wooden bridge. It must be the ladies. Dora rushed hastily through the entry and out of the house.

But she experienced a fresh disappointment. True, a vehicle was really approaching, but it bore as little resemblance to the Justizrath's carriage in which Margarethe must arrive, as a kitchen chair to a cushioned fauteuil. It was a gaily painted wagon with a white tilt, drawn by a stiff farm-horse. Dora, made sulky by this fresh disappointment of her hopes, was about to go back into the house when, to her astonishment, the vehicle stopped under the linden trees and the driver, a sturdy peasant lad began to make clumsy preparations to descend from his seat. When he at last reached the ground he handed the reins to some one in the cart, turned slowly toward Dora, pulled sleepily at his cap and said: "Good-morning! Bring us a chair."

"A chair!" exclaimed Dora in astonishment.

"Yes, so she can get out," he explained pointing over his shoulder to the wagon, with the handle of his whip.

"Get out? but who's in there? There can't be anybody in the cart who wants us."

"But she does; she wants Mamselle Gretchen,

she says. We came the whole way expressly for that ; and its even farther than Kerelaer."

Dora now understood that some of the peasants whom her young mistress knew in her childhood had taken a fancy to pay her a visit. She was by no means pleased ; for in the first place she did not like to have memories of that period of her life newly awakened in Margarethe's mind, and secondly she suspected that some presumptuous demand was the true cause of the visit ; so she walked down to the cart with a somewhat unfriendly expression, and cast a glance under the tilt.

A pale, elderly woman, in a half fashionable, half countrified, but perfectly neat dress, sat within, and a pretty, delicate face with a pair of bright eyes, looked out at her inquiringly, but not timidly.

"Good-day," said Dora, "I hear you want to speak to Fraulein Margarethe Greven."

"Yes, indeed, I must speak to her ; so be kind enough to bring me a chair to help me down. I am lame."

"The young lady isn't at home," said Dora, hoping to get rid of the stranger.

"Not at home. But she will soon come back?"

"She has gone away on a journey," replied Dora evasively.

"Gone away on a journey !" exclaimed the stranger clasping her hands in terror. "Merciful Mother ! this is a misfortune."

"A misfortune ! Misfortune to whom ?" asked Dora suspiciously, thinking that she should find

positive confirmation of her supposition in regard to some preposterous demand.

“To whom? Alas! to poor young Herr Berger, and then I fear it would probably be one to Fraulein Gretchen.”

Dora’s sulky listlessness disappeared. She knew enough of Margarethe’s early history, to be aware that the name of Berger was not indifferent to her young mistress, and now asked eagerly: “And who are you, if I may inquire?”

“I sign myself Anna Hulsebush,” said the stranger with an air of dignified solemnity, “but I am generally called Annchen of Nordhecke.”

“Ah!” cried Dora, now completely thawed, “is it you Fraulein Annchen? Dear me, to think I should not have known it before! Bernard,” she called to a peasant lad who was peeping inquisitively around the corner of the house, “make haste and bring a chair so that the lady can get out! There—and now you can take the horse and wagon round into the barn, and then bring the driver into supper. Walk in, Fraulein Annchen, pray walk in. How pleased our young lady will be when she comes back to-night.”

From this time our old acquaintance, Annchen of Nordhecke, had every reason to be satisfied with her reception at Bergefort; and was so. For the remainder of her days this journey was a source of the greatest pride, and she never ceased to give her numerous acquaintances and other good friends

every detail of it, with the most heartfelt pleasure and conscientious accuracy.

When the shadows began to lengthen, the Justiz-rath's carriage really came across the wooden bridge, and Fraulein Heber and Margarethe alighted under the linden trees. Both were very glad to return to the quiet house. Fraulein Heber was greatly strengthened by the waters of the springs, and Margarethe felt enabled to successfully resist the memory of a beautiful but now dangerous Past, by the beneficial employment which the new ties formed between Countess Louise and herself afforded her thoughts.

Annchen's unexpected presence increased the cheerfulness of the welcome which the faithful old servant had prepared for the young girl on her return to her own house.

The first half hour was passed in gay questions and answers about various little experiences which had occurred to both; but Annchen gradually became more and more quiet; and Margarethe who was familiar with her old friend's moods, asked sympathizingly: "What is the matter, Annchen? You have something on your mind."

"Yes, and something that weighs very heavily, Fraulein Gretchen. Could I speak to you a moment alone?"

"Certainly; you shall tell me everything that troubles you. Come into this room. There, sit down at the little table by the window. I will take the place opposite to you, then we shall be

together just as we so often were in your own room."

"Yes, Fraulein Gretchen. And can you still remember what we talked about then? Especially the last evening, before your uncle took you away from old Jost?"

"Oh! we talked about all sorts of things, Annchen," said Margarethe, blushing in spite of herself. "The Hofschultin's cap, I believe, among other things."

Annchen laughed. "To be sure; you had rumpled one of the loops. But that wasn't what I meant. We were also talking about a young gentleman who was then in England."

"Of Leo!" exclaimed Margarethe, with a sudden change of color.

"Yes, of him. You then persisted that he would inquire about you when he came back; I didn't believe it. But you were right; he came to me and asked about you with tears in his eyes. I did not dare to tell where you lived, because you and your uncle had so strictly forbidden it."

"It was better so, Annchen. He will never come to you to inquire about me again; for he is going to marry a young lady in D——."

Annchen nodded sadly. "I know it; they say he consented because she is rich and his father has been very unfortunate in business. I don't know how that is; he may have done it for his father's sake, and he may love her. But it is all the same to us;

the misfortune is that it won't avail him, whether he marries her out of love for his father or herself."

"How so? What do you mean?" asked Margarethe, gasping for breath.

"I heard it from some one who knows all about it; the messenger from D——, who came to bring some goods to B——. He said all D—— was full of it."

"Of what, Annchen? What did the man say?"

"He said that old Berger had lost a frightful amount in business; enough to buy B—— with all the peasants' farms. Yes, he has been rich; but now his debts will ruin him. If he don't pay twenty, or forty, or fifty thousand thalers by the middle of this month, he will be put in prison and brought before the courts."

Margarethe had heard enough of commercial law and similar subjects from her dead uncle's occasional conversations with business men, to be able to form some idea, although not a very clear one, of the consequences of bankruptcy, and especially pretended bankruptcy. The information which Annchen now gave to her about Herr Berger's affairs seemed to indicate only too clearly a failure of the latter description. Good Heavens! how Leo, who was so upright, so noble, so honorable, must feel at such a disgraceful calamity! She sat opposite her little informant, pale and silent, scarcely knowing what more to ask, and still less how to shape her questions, but Annchen continued:

"I thought his eldest son, who had made such a wealthy marriage in M——, would help him; but the young wife and the father-in-law won't hear of such a thing. They say, too, it doesn't trouble him at all; he is avaricious and glad to have an excuse for keeping his pockets shut, and hiding behind his wife's father."

"But that is really terrible," said Margarethe, half grieved, half indignant. "Even if the father has done wrong, the son ought to help him in the hour of need."

"So I say, Fraulein Gretchen; and it is all the more shameful in Herr Rudolph, because his father really isn't at all to blame. People in D——, say that he has had nothing but misfortune for the last few years."

"But Leo, that is his youngest son—has he no help for his father?"

"Oh! they say he would have given up everything he inherited from his mother, even her gold ear-rings and diamond cross. But it is no use; their debts are like the sands of the sea."

"It is sad—very sad, Annchen! But didn't you say that the youngest Herr Berger was betrothed to a wealthy girl?"

"Yes, and that is the most pitiful part of the whole affair. Herr Leo wanted to be married before the middle of this month, and then when he had his wife's money in his hands, he could pay his father's debts and help him out of his difficulties. But she got wind of it, and is neither more nor less

than a merchant's daughter. She got wind of it—I mean of what her lover intended to do with her money—and so she deferred the wedding until the last of the month. But by that time everything will be over; the old gentleman will have been imprisoned; and what is the worst of the matter, Herr Leo cannot release him. His betrothed has had all her money settled upon herself, so that he can't give away the value of a groschen without her consent. The messenger said he begged her on his knees to save his father, but in vain; and ever since then he has gone about like a shadow on the wall, and it is pitiable to see him."

Margarethe rose from her chair, looking paler and more terrified than when she stood by her uncle's death-bed, walked to another window, gazed out at the little patch of turf, which lay half concealed under the shadow of the chestnut tree, and clasping her hands, murmured gently: "Oh! Leo, poor Leo, what a fearful shipwreck of hope and happiness, love and faith, you must have suffered! So this was the cause of your sudden betrothal; and you did it in vain; in vain you threw away your sole joy and mine—the memory of the Past; but your father shall be aided. This burden, at least, I can remove from your heart, and it shall be done without delay."

"And you came to tell me all this?" she said, turning to Annchen.

"Yes, Fraulein Gretchen. I made up my mind to do so as soon as I heard it; for I thought you

would never forgive me if you did not learn it in time."

"You faithful heart! Thank you; you were perfectly right. I should never have been happy again if the father of such a kind old friend as Herr Leo Berger has been to me, sank to ruin unaided, when it was so easy for me to assist him. You say help must reach him before the middle of the month. Yes? Then there is no time to lose; to-day is the 10th. I must set out to D——, at dawn to-morrow. Fraulein Heber will probably be too tired to travel again after a short night's rest; but no matter—I dare not wait. What impropriety could any one find in my seeking a short interview with an old man, whose two sons are already married, or the same as married. And suppose they do! I must be in D—— to-morrow evening; he shall not suffer any grief I can spare him, one moment longer than is necessary, while I am able to remove it."

When Fraulein Heber heard the subject of the discussion, she insisted upon accompanying her young friend to D——, and, touched by her faithful affection, Margarethe gratefully accepted her offer. Annchen easily allowed herself to be persuaded to remain with Dora until the two ladies returned, and the next morning, an hour after sunrise, stood with tearful eyes beside the old servant under the linden trees, gazing after the traveling carriage which had just crossed the wooden bridge and turned down the road over which it had come the day before.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN THE HOUR OF NEED.

Another day of weary toil to old Berger and his son was drawing to a close. They had received business calls, written letters, cast up accounts, and sent replies to correspondents. Small sums had been received, large amounts paid out, and their whole occupation was assuming more and more the character of settling up a business. In vain had the unfortunate merchant looked to various quarters for assistance, in vain applied here and there for aid; all his efforts were unsuccessful, and although to the astonishment of his son, and the chagrin of his enemies, he had still continued to pay all demands, he could unfortunately clearly calculate the hour when he should be compelled to cease doing so. Leo assisted him faithfully and ably; the young man was as calm, cautious, and unwearied in his activity as his father; though both were equally hopeless, and had no other support than their torturing excitement, and the honorable desire to do their duty honestly until the last moment.

They had left the counting house and entered the

sitting-room, where they sat in dejected silence. Old Herr Berger was biting a cigar he had forgotten to light, and his son sat gazing at him, apparently watching his father's unavailing efforts to smoke, but really scarcely knowing what was before him.

The door-bell rang, questions and answers were audible, and then steps approached along the hall; Leo changed his position uneasily; for the slightest incident now made him anxious. His father laid aside his cigar and began to pace up and down the room.

The servant entered. "Here is a letter for you, Herr Berger; the waiter from the 'Black Eagle' brought it, and says he will wait for an answer."

"Very well, take him into the kitchen; I will ring when the answer is ready. He approached the table and held the letter near the lamp, but the seal and hand-writing were both unfamiliar. He read the lines, and threw the sheet gloomily aside. "It is from a lady, a stranger, who is lodging at the 'Black Eagle.' She begs me to call upon her to-night, as she has important business to communicate, whose nature she hopes will not be disagreeable to me. The note hasn't even a signature."

Leo took up the letter; the writing was unfamiliar to him also; it was Fraulein Heber's hand. But as the writer earnestly desired to receive a visit from his father, and the latter did not seem inclined to comply with her request, he asked kindly:

"Shall I go, father? The lady appears to consider her business important."

"Yes, what will it prove to be? Some gossiping old acquaintance who has stopped in passing through the town, and will tell me she is coming from her son's wedding, or her grand-daughter's christening. But I will go; it is still too early for bed, and the hours until then seem interminably long."

Leo made no objection. He did not envy his father the little diversion of mind, of whatever character it might be. So the merchant took his hat and cane, and his son remained alone with his cheerless thoughts.

The "Black Eagle" was a quiet respectable inn, which stood in the outskirts of the city, near one of the gates. Berger walked slowly towards it, too deeply occupied with his oppressive cares to feel anything more than a fleeting interest in the approaching interview with his unknown correspondent. As he stepped into the lighted doorway of the hotel, he was really obliged to stop to remember the cause of his presence there. A maid servant led the way up the stair-case, opened the door of one of the best rooms, and said: "Here is the gentleman you sent for, Fraulein."

"You are very welcome," said a pleasant voice, and a lady dressed in black rose from a sofa in the back of the room, and advanced to meet her visitor with evident timidity. To the merchant's astonishment, he did not see the familiar face of some

elderly acquaintance, but a very beautiful young girl, a total stranger. He supposed that there must be some mistake, and said apologetically: I beg your pardon if I am not the visitor you expect; a note which was perhaps addressed to me by mistake, induced me to present myself to you."

"Are you Herr Berger Senior?" replied the stranger in a tone of courteous inquiry.

"That is my name," said the old gentleman with a polite bow.

"Then you are certainly the gentleman whose visit I requested," replied the stranger, fixing her eyes on his pale wrinkled face with an expression of involuntary sympathy, as she offered him a chair. "Pardon the liberty I have taken, and allow me to make a request, for whose fulfilment I am very anxious."

Berger was perfectly bewitched by the modest loveliness of his new acquaintance, and his reply came from his heart: "I almost fear that I am not in a condition at present to be of any use to you, and I am very sorry for your sake, my dear young lady; for it would make me happy to be permitted to do you a favor."

"Thank you for your kind reply," said the stranger cordially, "it is really a guarantee for the gratification of my wish, for you can—I am sure—easily grant what I was about to ask."

"Will you be kind enough to explain yourself more clearly."

"Certainly; I am entirely alone"—a vivid blush

suffused the stranger's pale, beautiful face—"and have a considerable fortune. An able business man like yourself, Herr Berger, has perhaps no idea how tiresome and burdensome the care of such an estate can become to a young, inexperienced woman. So I thought—I hoped—with your business knowledge, your well-known ability, it would not be difficult for you to aid me, so—so—"

"So you have selected me for your steward?" asked Berger, smiling at her embarrassment, and at the same time greatly astonished at the mysterious confidence offered him here, while elsewhere he met nothing but distrust on all sides.

"Not exactly," she replied somewhat more boldly. "Inexperienced as I am, I have sufficient judgment to perceive that a busy merchant would have neither time nor inclination to undertake such a task. I therefore merely wished to ask your permission to place my ready money in your hands to be invested in your business, either for a small share in the profits, or at the customary rate of interest. I should, of course, leave that for you to decide."

Berger stared at the stranger in speechless astonishment; his honesty was struggling violently against the impulse of self-preservation; he was unable to think clearly, to form any decision. She knew not how to interpret his silence; but animated by the desire to put an end to his anxieties as quickly as possible, conquered her increasing embarrassment, and continued: "I brought all I had in

the public funds with me; it amounts to 165,000 thalers, and I should like to have you take charge of it at once." She placed a small package on the table before him. "It is disagreeable for me to be obliged to take care of so much ready money in a hotel. Your note, or whatever you think proper to give me, you can send to-morrow."

The old man sat still before her, pale and silent, his breast heaving as if in some painful struggle, and there was indeed a mortal combat going on within its depths between his consciousness of right and his ardent desire to be preserved from disgrace and misery. The temptation was near him, in its most alluring form. He need only stretch out his hand to possess the means he required to re-establish his tottering credit, to regain his lost property. But could he practice such a deception upon this innocent creature who trusted herself so confidently in his hands? Should this frank, charming face be transformed into a picture of horror by his dishonesty? No—he would rather endure ruin and disgrace in their most terrible forms, than be guilty of such want of conscience.

"My dear young lady," he said in a choking voice—he had scarcely strength to speak aloud—"you give me a most flattering proof of confidence; I will show that I deserve it by declining it."

"You reject my offer?" she asked greatly alarmed. "I beg you Herr Berger, tell me why?"

"Because I am not the rich man for whom you take me. Because I am unable to offer you any

kind of security for the large sum you wish to entrust to me."

"But dear Herr Berger," faltered Margarethe in an imploring tone, "I have not asked for any security from you. A simple receipt is sufficient, and you can write that at any moment."

"You make it difficult for me to protect you from the consequence of your great confidence; in order to do so with entire success I must be perfectly frank with you. I have suffered heavy losses. My debts exceed my property to nearly the whole amount of the sum you wished to entrust to me—I am a ruined man."

As he made this painful confession in a low trembling voice, Margarethe turned very pale, and her eyes filled with tears, but almost before he finished speaking, she said in a tone of eager entreaty: "Oh! Herr Berger, if that is true you must accept my proposal all the more readily. A man like you must not be ruined, a house like yours must not fall. Pray do not refuse me the honor of contributing in some degree to the renewed prosperity of your firm; and if you will not accept me for a creditor, make me your silent partner. I believe that is what they call it," she added, with a sweet smile on her pale face. "Satisfy your importunate creditors, and whatever else you may need to continue your business I will gladly place at your disposal, so far as my means allow."

Trembling with agitation the old man faltered: "I am too unworthy of the blessing, or I should

believe God has sent an angel to my aid. But child—child!” he exclaimed, seizing her hand, startled by a sudden suspicion, “tell me who you are!”

“Herr Berger,” whispered Margarethe timidly, “I—I fear you will scarcely know my name.”

“I do—must know it—oh! child, are you not Leo’s Margarethe?”

“Herr Berger,” exclaimed Margarethe alarmed and half offended, forcibly withdrawing her hand. “I was your son’s playmate, and am sincerely grateful to him for the great kindness he showed to me when I was a poor forsaken child. But no other tie exists between him and myself, nor ever can.”

“Nor ever can?” asked Herr Berger, fixing his eyes thoughtfully upon her blushing face. “Will Leo think so too when he learns what immense sacrifices you have made for us!”

“Herr Berger,” exclaimed Margarethe again, now standing before him deeply angered. “I am sure if he *did* learn all, there would be no thought in his mind which he would be forced to conceal from his promised bride. But, I expect, nay demand, on your honor as a gentleman, an unbroken silence to be maintained in regard to everything that has passed between us. Your son and his future wife need *never* learn who it is who becomes from to-day the silent partner in the firm. I have no more fervent desire than to save the friend and teacher of my childhood from anxiety and sorrow. For his sake, as well as mine, this must

be done without his having the slightest suspicion from whom the assistance comes."

"Margarethe, my dear daughter," stammered the man who had once been such a bitter enemy, deeply agitated, "you are a glorious creature! You wished to aid him without his knowing anything about it. You wished to give up all you possess for him without asking a word of thanks! And you speak of his promised bride—dear child—who told you of his unhappy betrothal?"

"I saw the announcement in a newspaper," said Margarethe in a hollow tone. Herr Berger was about to reply; but he checked the words on his lips, murmuring: "No—he shall tell her himself." Then turning to Margarethe he added: "For Leo's sake, my dear child, I gratefully accept your generous assistance. I will go now and get you the necessary notes—no, do not protest against it. I shall return in a moment. Wait for me until I come for this," he pointed to the package of bonds.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BARRIER SURMOUNTED.

When his father left him, Leo's eyes followed the old man with a sorrowful glance; it was principally for his sake that he felt the misfortunes of the house so keenly. If the matter had concerned himself alone, he would have seen the remainder of his property disappear into his creditors' hands without any regret, and then cheerfully departed to some distant land. No ties bound him to his native city, and he was scarcely less indifferent to the proximity of the brother who had treated his father and himself in such an unkind, unfilial manner. With the industry and energy on which he could rely, he could ere long have laid the foundations of a new career, far from home—and perhaps Margarethe would have consented to become his in a land where both were unknown. Oh! what a happy, radiant vision this was amid the perplexities that surrounded him! But the beautiful picture soon faded. How could he now, in his poverty, approach the beloved one whom his father had treated so slightly, so long as he was rich and distinguished.

No—the dream was too bright and fleeting for him to be permitted to indulge in it. These wishes, which could never be realized, weakened his strength, and he needed all his firmness and energy to stand manfully beside his unfortunate father; so he turned resolutely away from the enervating thoughts of his lost happiness, and buried himself in the anxieties of the present.

When his father returned, he found him still absorbed in these cares. “Come, Leo,” he said kindly, and his voice sounded more cheerful than it had done for a long time, “are you still sitting in the same corner where I left you? Shake off these sad thoughts, my boy. The time of misfortune is over, and the house of *Berger & Son*”—he emphasized the last word—“will, please God, still exist in honor for many a year.”

At his father’s words Leo turned hastily towards him. He really feared the excess of sorrow had produced an injurious effect upon the old man’s reason, and his face involuntarily expressed anxiety and compassion.

The old man held out his hand with a smile. “I believe you don’t trust your own senses, Leo; but I will solve the mystery. A faithful, generous friend, whose equal could not be found in the world, heard of our misfortunes and hastened to our assistance.”

“Dear father, is it true? Can it be possible?”

“Try to believe me; the news I bring is so good,” said Berger with a gay laugh. “Come, take your hat; I must introduce you this very evening to the

one who has become our preserver in this great need."

The two gentlemen reached the "Black Eagle" in a very short time. Herr Berger led the way up the stair-case, knocked at the door of a room on the first story, but instantly opened it as if he could scarcely wait for the friendly "Come in," and entered the apartment with Leo.

"Here he is, dear child, here he is. He shall thank you himself; and hear from your own lips how faithful you have been to him."

Margarethe had hastened forward to meet the old man, but as she heard his words and caught sight of his companion, she stopped in terror, faltering with white lips the name of Leo.

"Margarethe, it is Margarethe!" he exclaimed, equally agitated. "Oh! dear father, didn't you know that it was Margarethe herself?"

"Of course, I knew it;" replied his father, smiling through his tears, "and I thought I could give you both no greater pleasure than by bringing you together at once. Did I not do right?"

"Right?" asked Leo trembling with joy as he tried to clasp Margarethe's hand. "Oh! dearest father."

But Margarethe drew back calmly and gravely, saying reproachfully: "You have not kept your promise, Herr Berger."

"Have I not, my daughter?" asked the latter with a joyous smile. "But I could not keep it; for I never made any. True, you wished me to say

nothing to Leo about your generosity; but in your eagerness to aid us, you didn't notice that I failed to give my word."

"Oh! Margarethe, did you really ask that!" said Leo mournfully. You wished to save me from want and misery, but grudged me the blissful knowledge that you were my preserver; the sweet joy of thanking you, *you* Margarethe? Do you suppose that all your wealth would be able to procure for me *one* hour of happiness you did not share?"

"I must hope so at least, Herr Berger," replied Margarethe in a low tone, completely bewildered by his passionate complaints.

"You hope so? And you speak to me so coldly? Alas! your tone was far warmer when you sent me from you, never to see me more."

Margarethe was deeply moved, his face, his voice, his very gestures began to exert their old magic; but she regained her strength, and firmly resolving never to interfere with another's rights, said with reproachful earnestness, although her heart was bleeding at the thought of giving him pain: "At that time, Herr Berger, I allowed both you and myself to give expression to feelings in which there might be anguish, but no wrong; but now every recollection of a Past which must be utterly dead to you, would wrong the just claims of the Present."

"What are you talking about, Margarethe?" he asked in great perplexity. "Can you have heard

—speak— are you alluding to my betrothal to that—that Huldah Neuberg?”

“Can you doubt it?” she asked, almost sternly.

“Oh! then all is well again!” he exclaimed joyfully. “You will forgive me, I know you will, when you learn that I never performed an act of greater self denial, than in the days when I took upon myself the burden of seeming faithlessness, while my heart was almost breaking in the struggle with its beloved memories of you.”

As she still gazed at him earnestly in silence, he exclaimed with passionate regret, “Oh! Margarethe, don’t you believe me? Have you lost all confidence in me?”

His agony destroyed all her doubts; but she answered in a low tone: “No, Leo, I believe every word you say as implicitly as ever; but what does that avail us when you are still bound to another!”

“No,” he cried exultantly, “no, love, I am free! That girl had a passing fancy for the son of the wealthy Herr Berger, which was not sufficient to bind her to poor Leo, when his father’s losses became known. Do you still look sorrowfully at me? After so many cares and sorrows will you not cheer my future life, and teach me to forget how near I have been to utter despair?”

“I have never been angry with you, Leo,” she said, holding out her hand to him, “and I thank God that henceforward we shall be permitted to think of each other with love and joy; but I see your father will never—”

"I think, child," exclaimed old Berger, trying to conceal his emotion, "that you see rather incorrectly. Do you really suppose I shall add ingratitude to my former contemptible arrogance? No, your generous heart does not believe it," he continued in an agitated tone, clasping her in his arms with paternal affection. "Come, Leo, take her from your father; love her and make her as happy as she deserves to be."

"Father, dear father!" both exclaimed, and Margarethe, she scarcely knew how, found herself transferred from Herr Berger's arms to her lover's.

"Yes, children! And you must allow the old man to live with you; for I cannot part from my little daughter, any more than from the son, who, without complaint, sacrificed everything to me, even his future peace, after my harshness had destroyed his happiness."

CHAPTER XXX.

SOCIAL EQUALITY.

The house of Berger & Son, as it was henceforth called, triumphed over the evil predictions and malicious hopes of its enemies, and in a short time obtained greater wealth, influence, and distinction than it had ever before possessed, so that the house of Hagendorf could no longer compete with it. This caused a slight feeling of envy to arise in Rudolph's heart, but he was not yet wicked enough, not to struggle against it. The beautiful Emma, however, bitterly felt that she had fallen from the imaginary throne she had occupied as the most beautiful young married lady in her circle, the greatly admired daughter-in-law, and the wife of the richest merchant in the vicinity. She could not conceal it from herself. Her father-in-law placed the wife of his youngest son as far above her, as Leo was superior to his brother in every respect, and as for the gentlemen in their circle, "they were all bewitched by the smooth face." But the principal ladies also gradually drew near the charming young wife with love and confidence. Berger's

house soon became the most popular in the neighborhood, and even the cheerfulness of the old man, and the quiet refined manners of Fraulein Heber surpassed everything of the kind that was to be found elsewhere.

But every year Margarethe left her bright social home to spend a few quiet weeks at the old house in Bergefort. There she always received a beloved, eagerly welcomed visitor. This was the Countess Louise von Guntersburg, who ever since the day in the forester's house at —, had never grown cold in her affection for Margarethe. The sisters clung to each other with deep tenderness and perfect trust; and if their loving intercourse was a sweet joy to Margarethe it became a real blessing to Louise. In her noble, gentle sister, she found the model of all the goodness and beauty for which her richly gifted nature so well fitted her. From her she learned gentleness and self-denial, love and patience; and thus her bad qualities, her arrogance, coldness, and gloomy resignation, gradually disappeared before her innate goodness and happiness. This happy change was especially beneficial to her husband, and well aware whom he had to thank for it, he always felt a deep, grateful reverence for Margarethe. True, in her hours of despondency, when the old gloominess asserted itself, Louise doubtless said to herself that it was far easier for her sister to be good and lovable, by the side of a husband whom she loved as ardently as he returned her affection, than for her, who was obliged to bear

with so many weaknesses, and show so much forbearance to Count Guntersburg. But she was always compelled to acknowledge that she possessed her husband's sincere affection, that it was his earnest and unceasing endeavor to make her happy, and if the destiny that had fallen to her lot was less happy than her dear Margarethe's, it was still very enviable in comparison to the fate of many wives in her position in society. "And besides, I do not deserve to be so happy as she, nor do I expect it," she murmured, "but I will not grow weary of learning from her, that she may always consider me worthy of her love."

Margarethe never saw her father; she did not wish to do so, for she thought—perhaps with reason—that in a personal intercourse she should scarcely be able to show a child's proper respect to the man from whom her mother had suffered such a bitter wrong; but she sent him many affectionate messages by Louise, and received his fatherly blessing. She gave her sister's name to her oldest daughter, and Countess Guntersburg had a handsome little son with fair curls and laughing blue eyes, whom she called Leo. "I have no daughter, Margarethe," she said, "but you must be my child's god-mother; so as I can't name the little fellow Gretchen, he shall bear your husband's name, and thus my family and myself will always have a memento of you and your happy household."



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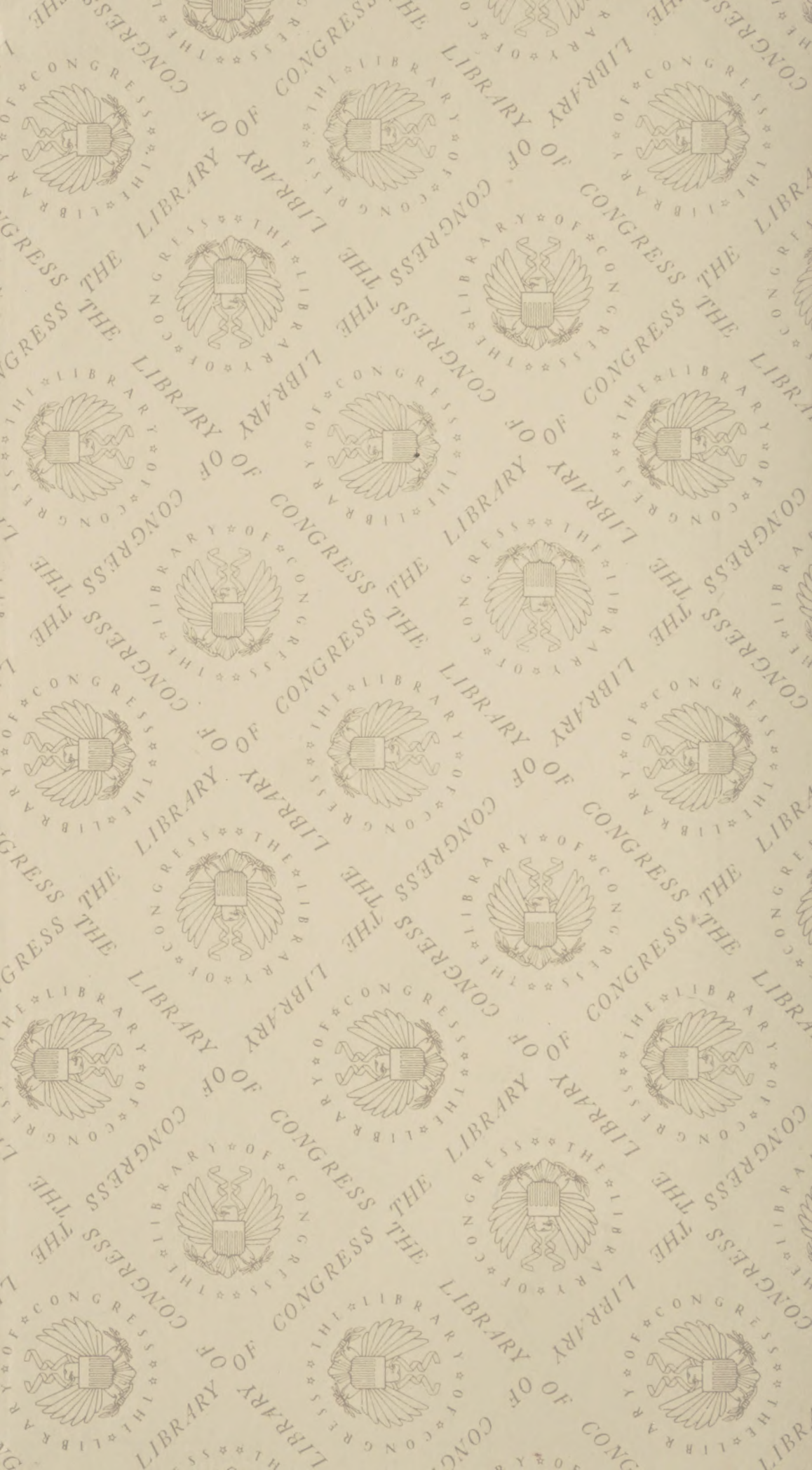
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